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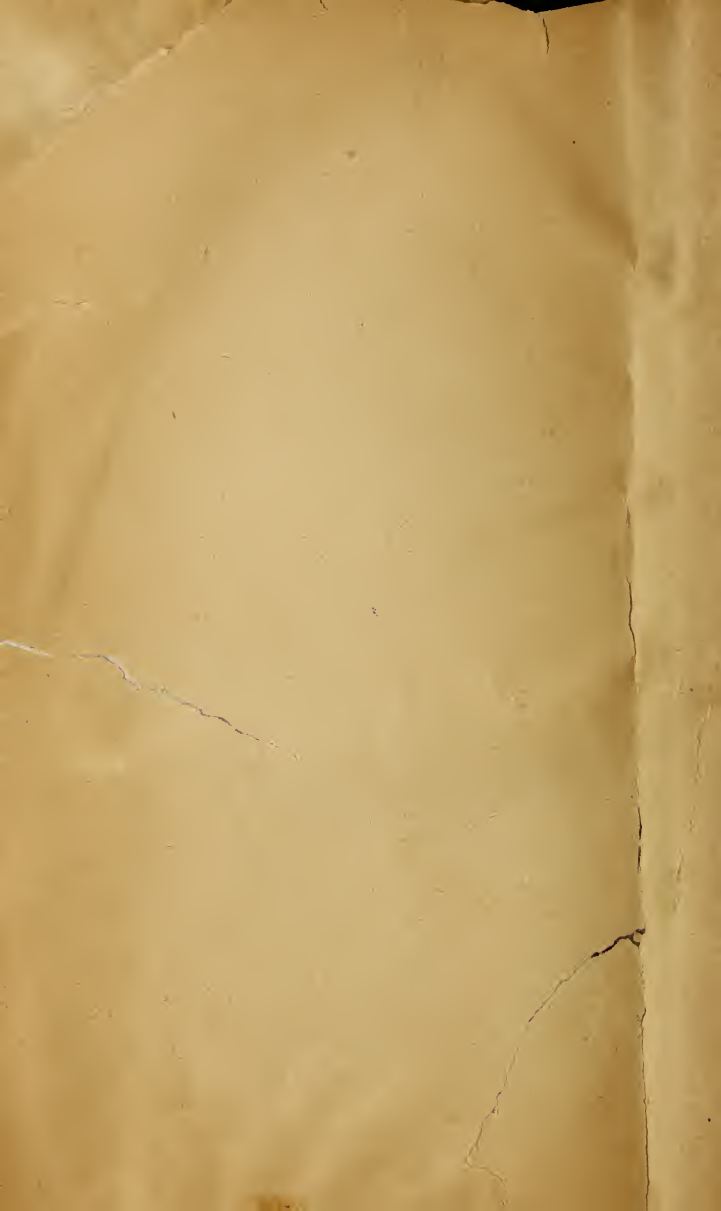
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THE D'ARTAGNAN ROMANCES.

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THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE.

VOL. V.

The Man in the Iron Mask  
Part I





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THE  
**VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE;**

OR,  
  
TEN YEARS LATER.

BY  
  
ALEXANDRE DUMAS.

IN SIX VOLUMES.

VOL. V.

LONDON: J. M. DENT & CO.

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1893.

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# THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE.

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## CHAPTER I.

WHEREIN MAY BE SEEN THAT A BARGAIN WHICH CANNOT  
BE MADE WITH ONE PERSON CAN BE CARRIED OUT WITH  
ANOTHER.

ARAMIS had been perfectly correct in his supposition. Immediately on leaving the house in the Place Baudoyer, Madame de Chevreuse had proceeded homeward. She was doubtless afraid of being followed, and had sought in this way to cover her steps ; but as soon as she had arrived within the door of the hotel, and assured herself that no one who could cause her any uneasiness was on her track, she opened the door of the garden leading into another street, and hurried towards the Rue Croix-des-Petits-Champs, where M. Colbert resided.

We have already said that evening, or rather night, had closed in, — and it was a dark, thick night. Paris had once more sunk into its calm, quiescent state, enshrouding alike within its indulgent mantle the high-born duchess carrying out her political intrigue, and the simple citizen's wife who having been detained late by a supper in the city was proceeding homewards, on the arm of a lover, by the longest possible route.

Madame de Chevreuse had been too well accustomed to nocturnal politics not to know that a minister never denies himself, even at his own private residence, to any young and beautiful woman who may chance to object to the dust and confusion of a public office ; or to old women, as full of experience as of years, who dislike the indiscreet echo of official residences. A valet received the duchess under the peristyle, and received her, it must be admitted, with some indifference of manner ; he intimated, after having looked at her face, that it was hardly at such an hour that one so advanced in years as herself could be permitted to disturb M. Colbert's important occupations. But Madame de Chevreuse, without disquietude, wrote her name upon a leaf of her tablets,—a blustering name, which had so often sounded disagreeably in the ears of Louis XIII. and of the great cardinal. She wrote her name in the large ill-formed characters of the higher classes of that period, folded the paper in a manner peculiarly her own, and handed it to the valet without uttering a word, but with so haughty and imperious a gesture that the fellow, well accustomed to judge of people from their manners and appearance, perceived at once the quality of the person before him, bowed his head, and ran to M. Colbert's room.

The minister could not control a sudden exclamation as he opened the paper ; and the valet, gathering from it the interest with which his master regarded the mysterious visitor, returned as fast as he could to beg the duchess to follow him. She ascended to the first floor of the beautiful new house very slowly, rested herself on the landing-place in order not to enter the apartment out of breath, and appeared before M. Colbert, who with his own hands held open the folding-doors. The duchess paused at the threshold for the purpose of studying well the character of



the man with whom she was about to converse. At the first glance the round, large, heavy head, thick brows, and ill-favored features of Colbert, who wore, thrust low down on his head, a cap like a priest's *calotte*, seemed to indicate that but little difficulty was likely to be met with in her negotiations with him, but also that she was to expect little interest in the discussion of particulars; for there was scarcely any indication that that rude man could be susceptible to the attractions of a refined revenge or of an exalted ambition. But when on closer inspection the duchess perceived the small, piercingly black eyes, the longitudinal wrinkles of his high and massive forehead, the imperceptible twitching of the lips, on which were apparent traces of rough good-humor, she changed her mind and said to herself, "I have found the man I want."

"What has procured me the honor of your visit, Madame?" he inquired.

"The need I have of you, Monsieur," returned the duchess, "and that which you have of me."

"I am delighted, Madame, with the first portion of your sentence; but so far as the second portion is concerned —"

Madame de Chevreuse sat down in the arm-chair which M. Colbert placed before her. "M. Colbert, you are the intendant of finances?"

"Yes, Madame."

"And are ambitious of becoming the superintendent?"

"Madame!"

"Nay, do not deny it! That would only unnecessarily prolong our conversation, — it is useless."

"And yet, Madame," replied the intendant, "however well disposed and inclined to show politeness I may be towards a lady of your position and merit, nothing will

make me confess that I have ever entertained the idea of supplanting my superior."

"I said nothing about supplanting, M. Colbert. Could I accidentally have made use of that word? I hardly think so. The word 'replace' is less aggressive in its signification, and more grammatically suitable, as M. de Voiture would say. I presume, therefore, that you are ambitious of replacing M. Fouquet."

"M. Fouquet's fortune, Madame, enables him to withstand all attempts. The superintendent in this age plays the part of the Colossus of Rhodes; the vessels pass beneath him, and do not overthrow him."

"I ought to have availed myself of that very comparison. It is true. M. Fouquet plays the part of the Colossus of Rhodes; but I remember to have heard it said by M. Conrart (a member of the Academy, I believe), that when the Colossus of Rhodes fell from its lofty position, the merchant who had cast it down — a merchant, nothing more, M. Colbert — loaded four hundred camels with the ruins. A merchant! — that is considerably less than an intendant of finances."

"Madame, I can assure you that I shall never overthrow M. Fouquet."

"Very good, M. Colbert, since you persist in showing so much sensitiveness with me, as if you were ignorant that I am Madame de Chevreuse, and also that I am somewhat advanced in years, — in other words, that you have to do with a woman who has had political dealings with the Cardinal de Richelieu, and who has no time to lose, — since, I say, you commit that imprudence, I shall go and find others who are more intelligent and more desirous of making their fortunes."

"How, Madame, how?"

"You give me a very poor idea of the negotiations of

the present day, Monsieur. I assure you that if in my time a woman had gone to M. de Cinq-Mars, who was not moreover a man of a very high order of intellect, and had said to him about the cardinal what I have just now said to you of M. Fouquet, M. de Cinq-Mars would by this time have put his irons in the fire."

"Nay, Madame, show a little indulgence."

"Well, then, you do really consent to replace M. Fouquet?"

"Certainly, I do, if the king dismisses M. Fouquet."

"Again a word too much; it is quite evident that if you have not yet succeeded in driving M. Fouquet from his post, it is because you have not been able to do so. Therefore I should be a simpleton if in coming to you I did not bring you the very thing you require."

"I am distressed to be obliged to persist, Madame," said Colbert, after a silence which enabled the duchess to sound the depth of his dissimulation; "but I must warn you that for the last six years denunciation after denunciation has been made against M. Fouquet, and he has remained unshaken and unaffected by them."

"There is a time for everything, M. Colbert; those who were the authors of such denunciations were not called Madame de Chevreuse, and they had no proofs equal to the six letters from M. de Mazarin which establish the offence in question."

"The offence!"

"The crime, if you like it better."

"The crime — committed by M. Fouquet!"

"Nothing less. It is rather strange, M. Colbert; but your face, which just now was cold and indifferent, is now all lighted up."

"A crime!"

"I am delighted to see it makes an impression upon you."

"Oh, that is a word, Madame, which embraces so many things!"

"It embraces the post of superintendent of finance for yourself, and a letter of exile or the Bastille for M. Fouquet."

"Forgive me, Madame the Duchess, but it is almost impossible that M. Fouquet can be exiled; to be imprisoned or disgraced, that alone is much."

"Oh, I am perfectly aware of what I am saying!" returned Madame de Chevreuse, coldly. "I do not live at such a distance from Paris as not to know what takes place there. The king does not like M. Fouquet, and he would willingly sacrifice the superintendent if an opportunity were only presented."

"It must be a good one, though."

"Good enough, and one I estimate to be worth five hundred thousand livres."

"In what way?" said Colbert.

"I mean, Monsieur, that holding this opportunity in my own hands I will not allow it to be transferred to yours except for a sum of five hundred thousand livres."

"I understand you perfectly, Madame. But since you have fixed a price for the sale, let me now see the value of the articles to be sold."

"Oh, a mere trifle, — six letters, as I have already told you, from M. de Mazarin; and the autographs will most assuredly not be regarded as too costly, if they establish in an irrefutable manner that M. Fouquet has embezzled large sums of money from the treasury and appropriated them to his own purposes."

"In an irrefutable manner, do you say?" observed Colbert, whose eyes sparkled with delight.

"Irrefutable; would you like to read the letters?"

"With all my heart! Copies, of course?"

"Of course, the copies," said the duchess, as she drew from her bosom a small packet of papers flattened by her velvet bodice. "Read!" she said.

Colbert eagerly snatched the papers and devoured them.

"Wonderful!" he said.

"It is clear enough, is it not?"

"Yes, Madame, yes. M. Mazarin must have handed the money to M. Fouquet, who must have kept it for his own purposes; but the question is, what money?"

"Exactly, — what money; if we come to terms, I will join to these six letters a seventh, which will supply you with the fullest particulars."

Colbert reflected. "And the originals of these letters?"

"A useless question to ask; exactly as if I were to ask you, M. Colbert, whether the money-bags you will give me will be full or empty."

"Very good, Madame."

"Is it concluded?"

"No; for there is one circumstance to which neither of us has given any attention."

"Name it!"

"M. Fouquet can be utterly ruined, under the circumstances you have detailed, only by means of legal proceedings."

"Well?"

"A public scandal."

"Yes, what then?"

"Neither the legal proceedings nor the scandal can be begun against him."

"Why not?"

"Because he is procureur-général of the parliament; because, too, in France, the government, the army, the courts of law, and commerce are intimately connected by ties of good-will, which people call *esprit de corps*. So,

Madame, the parliament will never permit its chief to be dragged before a public tribunal; and never, even if he be dragged there by royal authority, never will he be condemned."

"Ah! *ma foi!* M. Colbert, that does n't concern me."

"I am aware of that, Madame; but it concerns me, and it consequently diminishes the value of what you have brought to me. Of what use to bring me a proof of crime, without the possibility of condemnation?"

"Even if he be only suspected, M. Fouquet will lose his post of superintendent."

"That would be a great achievement!" exclaimed Colbert, whose dark, gloomy features were momentarily lighted up by an expression of hate and vengeance.

"Ah, ah! M. Colbert," said the duchess, "forgive me, but I did not think you were so impressionable. Very good; in that case, since you need more than I have to give you, there is no occasion to speak of the matter further."

"Yes, Madame, we will go on talking of it; only, as the value of your commodities has decreased, you must lower your price."

"You are bargaining, then?"

"Every man who wishes to deal loyally is obliged to do so."

"How much will you offer me?"

"Two hundred thousand livres," said Colbert.

The duchess laughed in his face, and then said suddenly, "Wait a moment, I have another arrangement to propose; will you give me three hundred thousand livres?"

"No, no."

"Oh, you can either accept or refuse my terms; besides, that is not all."



“More still? You are becoming too impracticable to deal with, Madame.”

“Less so than you think, perhaps, for it is not money I am going to ask you for.”

“What is it, then?”

“A service. You know that I have always been most affectionately attached to the queen, and I am desirous of having an interview with her Majesty.”

“With the queen?”

“Yes, M. Colbert, with the queen, who is, I admit, no longer my friend, and who has ceased to be so for a long time past, but who may again become so if the opportunity be only given her.”

“Her Majesty has ceased to receive any one, Madame. She is a great sufferer, and you may be aware that the paroxysms of her disease occur with greater frequency than ever.”

“That is the very reason why I wish to have an interview with her Majesty. In Flanders we have many diseases of that kind.”

“Cancers? — a fearful, incurable disorder.”

“Do not believe that, M. Colbert. The Flemish peasant is something of a savage; he has not a wife exactly, but a female.”

“Well, Madame?”

“Well, M. Colbert, while he is smoking his pipe, the woman works; it is she who draws the water from the well, — she who loads the mule or the ass, and even bears herself a portion of the burden. Taking but little care of herself, she gets knocked about here and there, sometimes is even beaten. Cancers arise from contusions.”

“True, true!” said Colbert.

“The Flemish women do not die the sooner on that account. When they are great sufferers from this disease,

they go in search of remedies ; and the Béguines of Bruges are excellent doctors for every kind of disease. They have precious waters of one sort or another,— specifics of various kinds ; and they give a bottle and a wax candle to the sufferer. They derive a profit from the priests, and serve God by the disposal of their two articles of merchandise. I will take the queen some of this holy water, which I will procure from the Béguines of Bruges ; her Majesty will recover, and will burn as many wax candles as she may think fit. You see, M. Colbert, to prevent my seeing the queen is almost as bad as committing the crime of regicide.”

“ You are, Madame the Duchess, a woman of great intelligence. You surprise me ; still, I cannot but suppose that this charitable consideration towards the queen covers some small personal interest of your own.”

“ Have I tried to conceal it, M. Colbert ? You spoke, I believe, of a small personal interest. Understand, then, that it is a great interest ; and I will prove it to you by resuming what I was saying. If you procure me a personal interview with her Majesty, I will be satisfied with the three hundred thousand livres I have demanded ; if not, I shall keep my letters, unless, indeed, you give me on the spot five hundred thousand livres for them.”

And rising from her seat with this decisive remark, the old duchess left M. Colbert in a disagreeable perplexity. To bargain any further was out of the question ; not to purchase would involve infinite loss. “ Madame,” he said, “ I shall have the pleasure of handing you over a hundred thousand crowns ; but how shall I get the actual letters themselves ? ”

“ In the simplest manner in the world, my dear M. Colbert, — whom will you trust ? ”

The financier began to laugh silently, so that his large



eyebrows went up and down like the wings of a bat upon the deep lines of his yellow forehead. "No one," he said.

"You surely will make an exception in your own favor, M. Colbert?"

"How is that, Madame?"

"I mean that if you would take the trouble to accompany me to the place where the letters are, they would be delivered into your own hands, and you would be able to verify and check them."

"Quite true."

"You would bring the hundred thousand crowns with you at the same time?—for I too do not trust any one."

Colbert colored to the tips of his ears. Like all eminent men in the art of figures, he was of an insolent and mathematical probity. "I will take with me, Madame," he said, "two orders for the amount agreed upon, payable at my treasury. Will that satisfy you?"

"Would that the orders on your treasury were for two millions, Monsieur the Intendant! I shall have the pleasure of showing you the way, then?"

"Allow me to order my carriage."

"I have a carriage below, Monsieur."

Colbert coughed like an irresolute man. He imagined for a moment that the proposition of the duchess was a snare; that perhaps some one was waiting at the door; and that she, whose secret had just been sold to Colbert for a hundred thousand crowns, had already offered it to Fouquet for the same sum. As he still hesitated a good deal, the duchess looked at him full in the face.

"You prefer your own carriage?" she said.

"I admit that I do."

"You suppose that I am going to lead you into a snare or trap of some sort or other?"

"Madame the Duchess, you have the character of being somewhat inconsiderate at times; and as I am clothed in a sober, solemn character, a jest or practical joke might compromise me."

"Yes; the fact is, you are afraid. Well, then, take your own carriage, as many servants as you like. Only, consider well, — what we two may arrange between us, we are the only persons who know it; what a third person may witness, we announce to the universe. After all, I do not make a point of it; my carriage shall follow yours, and I shall be satisfied to accompany you in your own carriage to the queen."

"To the queen!"

"Have you forgotten that already? Is it possible that one of the clauses of the agreement, of so much importance to me, can have escaped you already? How trifling it seems to you, indeed! If I had known it, I should have doubled my price."

"I have reflected, Madame, and I shall not accompany you."

"Really, — and why not?"

"Because I have the most perfect confidence in you."

"You overpower me. But how do I receive the hundred thousand crowns?"

"Here they are, Madame," said Colbert, scribbling a few lines on a piece of paper, which he handed to the duchess, adding, "You are paid."

"The trait is a fine one, M. Colbert, and I will reward you for it," she said, beginning to laugh.

Madame de Chevreuse's laugh had a very sinister sound. Every man who feels youth, faith, love, life itself, throbbing in his heart, would prefer tears to such a lamentable laugh.

The duchess opened the front of her dress and drew

forth from her bosom, somewhat less white than it once had been, a small packet of papers, tied with a flame-colored ribbon, and still laughing, she said, "There, M. Colbert, are the originals of Cardinal Mazarin's letters. They are now your own property," she added, refastening the body of her dress. "Your fortune is secured; and now accompany me to the queen."

"No, Madame; if you are again about to run the chance of her Majesty's displeasure, and it were known at the Palais-Royal that I had been the means of introducing you there, the queen would never forgive me while she lived. No; there are certain persons at the palace who are devoted to me, who will procure you an admission without my being compromised."

"Just as you please, provided I enter."

"What do you term those religious women at Bruges who cure disorders?"

"Béguines."

"Good; you are a Béguine."

"As you please, but I must soon cease to be one."

"That is your affair."

"Excuse me, but I do not wish to be exposed to a refusal."

"That is again your own affair, Madame. I am going to give directions to the head valet of the gentleman in waiting on her Majesty to allow admission to a Béguine, who brings an effectual remedy for her Majesty's sufferings. You are the bearer of my letter, you will undertake to be provided with the remedy, and will give every explanation on the subject. I admit a knowledge of a Béguine, but I deny all knowledge of Madame de Chevreuse. Here, Madame, then, is your letter of introduction."

## CHAPTER II.

## THE SKIN OF THE BEAR.

COLBERT handed the duchess the letter, and gently drew aside the chair behind which she was standing. Madame de Chevreuse, with a very slight bow, immediately left the room. Colbert, who had recognized Mazarin's handwriting and had counted the letters, rang to summon his secretary, whom he enjoined to go in immediate search of M. Vanel, a counsellor of the parliament. The secretary replied that, according to his usual practice, M. Vanel had just at that moment entered the house, in order to render to the intendant an account of the principal details of the business which had been transacted during the day in the sitting of the parliament. Colbert approached one of the lamps, read the letters of the deceased cardinal over again, smiled repeatedly as he recognized the great value of the papers which Madame de Chevreuse had just delivered to him, and burying his head in his hands for a few minutes reflected profoundly. In the mean time a tall, large-made man entered the room ; his spare, thin face, steady look, and hooked nose, as he entered Colbert's cabinet with a modest assurance of manner, revealed a character at once supple and decided, — supple towards the master who could throw him the prey ; firm towards the dogs who might possibly be disposed to dispute it with him. M. Vanel carried a voluminous bundle of papers under his arm, and placed it on the desk on which Colbert was leaning both his elbows, as he supported his head.

"Good-day, M. Vanel," said the latter, rousing himself from his meditation.

"Good-day, Monseigneur," said Vanel, naturally.

"You should say 'Monsieur,' and not 'Monseigneur,'" replied Colbert, gently.

"We give the title of 'Monseigneur' to ministers," returned Vanel, with extreme self-possession, "and you are a minister."

"Not yet."

"You are so in point of fact, and I call you 'Monseigneur' accordingly; besides, you are my seigneur, and that is sufficient. If you dislike my calling you 'Monseigneur' before others, allow me, at least, to call you so in private."

Colbert raised his head to the height of the lamps, and read, or tried to read, upon Vanel's face how much actual sincerity entered into this protestation of devotion. But the counsellor knew perfectly well how to sustain the weight of his look, even were it armed with the full authority of the title he had conferred. Colbert sighed. He had read nothing in Vanel's face; Vanel might be sincere. Colbert recollected that this man, inferior to himself, was superior to him in having an unfaithful wife. At the moment he was pitying this man's lot, Vanel coolly drew from his pocket a perfumed letter, sealed with Spanish wax, and held it towards Colbert, saying, "A letter from my wife, Monseigneur."

Colbert coughed, took, opened, and read the letter, and then put it carefully away in his pocket; while Vanel, unconcerned, turned over the leaves of the papers he had brought with him.

"Vanel," Colbert said suddenly to his *protégé*, "you are a hard-working man?"

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"Would twelve hours of labor frighten you?"

"I work fifteen hours every day."

"Impossible! A counsellor need not work more than three hours a day in the parliament."

"Oh! I am working up some returns for a friend of mine in the department of accounts; and as I still have time left on my hands, I am studying Hebrew."

"Your reputation stands high in the parliament, Vanel."

"I believe so, Monseigneur."

"You must not grow rusty in your post of counsellor."

"What must I do to avoid it?"

"Purchase a high place. Small ambitions are the most difficult to satisfy."

"Small purses are the most difficult to fill, Monseigneur."

"What post have you in view?" said Colbert.

"I see none, — not one."

"There is one, certainly; but one need be the king himself to be able to buy it without inconvenience; and the king will not be inclined, I suppose, to purchase the post of procureur-général."

At these words Vanel fixed his dull and humble look upon Colbert, who could hardly tell whether Vanel had comprehended him or not. "Why do you speak to me, Monseigneur," said Vanel, "of the post of procureur-général to the parliament? I know no other post than the one M. Fouquet fills."

"Exactly so, my dear counsellor."

"You are not over-fastidious, Monseigneur; but before the post can be bought, it must be offered for sale."

"I believe, M. Vanel, that it will be for sale before long."

"For sale? What! M. Fouquet's post of procureur-général?"



"So it is said."

"The post which renders him inviolable, for sale ! Oh, oh !" said Vanel, beginning to laugh.

"Would you be afraid, then, of the post ?" said Colbert, gravely.

"Afraid ! no ; but — "

"Nor desirous of obtaining it ?"

"You are laughing at me, Monseigneur," replied Vanel ; "is it likely that a counsellor of the parliament would not be desirous of becoming procureur-général ?"

"Well, M. Vanel, since I tell you that the post will be shortly for sale — "

"I cannot help repeating, Monseigneur, that it is impossible ; a man never throws away the buckler behind which he maintains his honor, his fortune, and his life."

"There are certain men mad enough, Vanel, to fancy themselves out of the reach of all mischances."

"Yes, Monseigneur ; but such men never commit their mad acts for the advantage of the poor Vanels of the world."

"Why not ?"

"For the very reason that those Vanels are poor."

"It is true that M. Fouquet's post might cost a good round sum. What would you bid for it, M. Vanel ?"

"Everything I am worth."

"Which means — "

"Three or four hundred thousand livres."

"And the post is worth — "

"A million and a half, at the very lowest. I know persons who have offered seventeen hundred thousand livres, without being able to persuade M. Fouquet to sell. Besides, supposing it were to happen that M. Fouquet wished to sell, — which I do not believe, in spite of what I have been told — "

"Ah, you have heard something about it, then! Who told you?"

"M. Gourville, M. Pellisson, and others."

"Very good; if, therefore, M. Fouquet did wish to sell —"

"I could not buy it just yet, since the superintendent will only sell for ready money, and no one has a million and a half to throw down at once."

Colbert suddenly interrupted the counsellor by an imperious gesture; he had begun to meditate. Observing his superior's serious attitude, and his perseverance in continuing the conversation on this subject, Vanel awaited the solution without venturing to precipitate it.

"Explain fully to me," said Colbert, at length, "the privileges of the office of procureur-général."

"The right of impeaching every French subject who is not a prince of the blood; the right of quashing all proceedings taken against any Frenchman who is neither king nor prince. The procureur-général is the arm of the king to strike the evil-doer, — his arm also to extinguish the torch of justice. M. Fouquet, therefore, will be able, by stirring up the parliament, to maintain himself even against the king; and the king also, by humoring M. Fouquet, can get his edicts registered without opposition. The procureur-général can be a very useful or a very dangerous instrument."

"Vanel, would you like to be procureur-général?" said Colbert, suddenly, softening both his look and his voice.

"I!" exclaimed the latter; "I have already had the honor to represent to you that I want about eleven hundred thousand livres to make up the amount."

"Borrow that sum from your friends."

"I have no friends richer than myself."

"You are an honorable man, Vanel."



"Ah, Monseigneur, if the world were to think as you do ! "

"I think so, and that is quite enough ; and if it should be needed, I will be your security."

"Remember the proverb, Monseigneur."

"What is that ? "

" 'The endorser pays.' "

"Let that make no difference."

Vanel rose, quite bewildered by this offer, which had been so suddenly and unexpectedly made to him by a man who treated the smallest affairs in a serious spirit.

"You are not trifling with me, Monseigneur ? " he said.

"Stay ! we must act quickly. You say that M. Gourville has spoken to you about M. Fouquet's post ? "

"Yes, and M. Pellisson also."

"Officially or officiously ? "

"These were their words : 'These parliamentary people are ambitious and wealthy ; they ought to get together two or three millions among themselves, to present to their protector and great luminary, M. Fouquet.' "

"And what did you reply ? "

"I said that, for my own part, I would give ten thousand livres if necessary."

"Ah, you like M. Fouquet, then ! " exclaimed Colbert, with a look full of hatred.

"No ; but M. Fouquet is our chief. He is in debt, — is on the high-road to ruin ; and we ought to save the honor of the body of which we are members."

"This explains to me why M. Fouquet will be always safe and sound so long as he occupies his present post," replied Colbert.

"Thereupon," said Vanel, "M. Gourville added : 'If we were to do anything out of charity to M. Fouquet, it could not be otherwise than most humiliating to him ; and he

would be sure to refuse it. Let the parliament subscribe among themselves to purchase in a proper manner the post of procureur-général. In that case all would go on well; the honor of our body would be saved, and M. Fouquet's pride spared.'"

"That is an opening."

"I considered it so, Monseigneur."

"Well, M. Vanel, you will go at once, and find out either M. Gourville or M. Pellisson. Do you know any other friend of M. Fouquet?"

"I know M. de la Fontaine very well."

"La Fontaine, the rhymester?"

"Yes; he used to write verses to my wife, when M. Fouquet was one of our friends."

"Go to him, then, and try to procure an interview with the superintendent."

"Willingly — but the sum?"

"On the day and hour when you arrange to settle the matter, M. Vanel, you shall be supplied with the money; so do not make yourself uneasy on that account."

"Monseigneur, such munificence! You eclipse kings even, — you surpass M. Fouquet himself."

"Stay a moment! Do not let us mistake each other. I do not make you a present of fourteen hundred thousand livres, M. Vanel, for I have children to provide for; but I will lend you that sum."

"Ask whatever interest, whatever security you please, Monseigneur; I am quite ready. And when all your requisitions are satisfied, I will still repeat that you surpass kings and M. Fouquet in munificence. What conditions do you impose?"

"The repayment in eight years, and a mortgage upon the appointment itself."

"Certainly. Is that all?"

“Wait a moment ! I reserve to myself the right of purchasing the post from you at one hundred and fifty thousand livres’ profit for yourself, if in your mode of filling the office you do not follow out a line of conduct in conformity with the interests of the king and with my projects.”

“Ah ! ah !” said Vanel, in a slightly altered tone.

“Is there anything in that which can possibly be objectionable to you, M. Vanel ?” said Colbert, coldly.

“Oh, no, no !” replied Vanel, quickly.

“Very good. We will sign an agreement to that effect whenever you like. And now go as quickly as you can to M. Fouquet’s friends, and obtain an interview with the superintendent. Do not be too difficult in making whatever concessions may be required of you ; and when once the arrangements are all made — ”

“I will press him to sign.”

“Be most careful to do nothing of the kind ; do not speak of signatures with M. Fouquet, nor of deeds, nor even ask him to pass his word. Understand this, otherwise you will lose everything. All you have to do is to get M. Fouquet to give you his hand on the matter. Go, go !”

## CHAPTER III.

## AN INTERVIEW WITH THE QUEEN-MOTHER.

THE queen-mother was in her bedroom at the Palais-Royal, with Madame de Motteville and the Señora Molina. The king, who had been impatiently expected the whole day, had not made his appearance; and the queen, who had grown quite impatient, had often sent to inquire about him. The whole atmosphere of the court seemed to indicate an approaching storm; the courtiers and the ladies of the court avoided meeting in the antechambers and the corridors, in order not to converse on compromising subjects.

Monsieur had joined the king early in the morning for a hunting-party; Madame remained in her own apartments, cool and distant to every one; and the queen-mother, after she had said her prayers in Latin, talked of domestic matters with her two friends in pure Castilian. Madame de Motteville, who understood the language perfectly, answered her in French. When the three ladies had exhausted every form of dissimulation and politeness to reach at last the charge that the king's conduct was causing grief to the queen and the queen-mother and all his family, and when in guarded phrases they had fulminated every variety of imprecation against Mademoiselle de la Vallière, the queen-mother terminated these recriminations by an exclamation indicative of her own reflections and character. "*Estos hijos!*" said she to Molina (which means, "These children!" — words full of meaning on a mother's lips, — words full of terrible significance in the

mouth of a queen who, like Anne of Austria, hid many curious and dark secrets in her soul).

"Yes," said Molina, "these children! for whom every mother becomes a sacrifice."

"To whom," replied the queen, "a mother has sacrificed everything."

Anne did not finish her phrase; for she fancied, when she raised her eyes towards the full-length portrait of the pale Louis XIII., that light had once more flashed from her husband's dull eyes, and that his nostrils were inflated by wrath. The portrait became a living being; it did not speak, it threatened.

A profound silence succeeded the queen's last remark. La Molina began to turn over the ribbons and lace of a large work-table. Madame de Motteville, surprised at the look of mutual intelligence which had been exchanged between the confidante and her mistress, cast down her eyes like a discreet woman, and pretending to be observant of nothing that was passing listened with the utmost attention. She heard nothing, however, but a very significant "Hum!" on the part of the Spanish duenna, who was the image of circumspection, and a profound sigh on the part of the queen. She looked up immediately. "You are suffering?" she said.

"No, Motteville, no; why do you say that?"

"Your Majesty almost groaned just now."

"You are right; I do suffer a little."

"M. Vallot is not far off; I believe he is in Madame's apartment."

"Why is he with Madame?"

"Madame is troubled with nervous attacks."

"A very fine disorder, indeed!" said the queen. "M. Vallot is wrong in being there, when another physician might cure Madame."

Madame de Motteville looked up with an air of great surprise, as she replied, "Another doctor instead of M. Vallot! Who, then?"

"Occupation, Motteville, occupation! Ah! if any one is really ill, it is my poor daughter."

"And your Majesty too."

"Less so this evening, though."

"Do not believe that too confidently, Madame," said De Motteville.

As if to justify the caution, a sharp pain seized the queen, who turned deadly pale, and threw herself back in the chair, with every symptom of a sudden fainting-fit. "My drops!" she murmured.

"Ah! ah!" replied Molina, who went without haste to a richly gilded tortoise-shell cabinet, from which she took a large rock-crystal smelling-bottle, and brought it, open, to the queen, who inhaled from it wildly several times, and murmured, "In that way the Lord will kill me; his holy will be done!"

"Your Majesty's death is not so near at hand," added Molina, replacing the smelling-bottle in the cabinet.

"Does your Majesty feel better now?" inquired Madame de Motteville.

"Much better," returned the queen, placing her finger on her lips, to impose silence on her favorite.

"It is very strange," remarked Madame de Motteville, after a pause.

"What is strange?" said the queen.

"Does your Majesty remember the day when this pain attacked you for the first time?"

"I remember only that it was a grievously sad day for me, Motteville."

"But your Majesty had not always regarded that day as a sad one."



“Why?”

“Because twenty-three years before, on that very day, his present Majesty, your own glorious son, was born at the very same hour.”

The queen uttered a loud cry, buried her face in her hands, and seemed utterly lost for some moments. Was it remembrance or reflection, or was it grief? La Molina darted a look at Madame de Motteville almost furious in its reproachfulness. The poor woman, ignorant of its meaning, was about to make inquiries in her own defence, when suddenly Anne of Austria arose and said: “Yes, the 5th of September; my sorrow began on the 5th of September. The greatest joy, one day; the deepest sorrow, the next,—the sorrow,” she added in a low voice, “the bitter expiation of a too excessive joy.”

And from that moment Anne of Austria, whose memory and reason seemed to have become entirely suspended for a time, remained impenetrable, with vacant look, mind almost wandering, and hands hanging heavily down, as if life had almost departed.

“We must put her to bed,” said La Molina.

“Presently, Molina.”

“Let us leave the queen alone,” added the Spanish attendant.

Madame de Motteville rose. Large and glistening tears were fast rolling down the queen’s pallid face; and Molina, having observed this sign of weakness, fixed her vigilant black eyes upon her.

“Yes, yes,” replied the queen. “Leave us, Motteville; go!”

The word “us” produced a disagreeable effect upon the ears of the French favorite; for it signified that an interchange of secrets or of revelations of the past was about



to be made, and that one person was *de trop* in the conversation which seemed likely to take place.

"Will Molina be sufficient for your Majesty to-night?" inquired the Frenchwoman.

"Yes," replied the queen.

Madame de Motteville bowed in submission, and was about to withdraw, when suddenly an old female attendant, dressed as if she had belonged to the Spanish Court of the year 1620, opened the door and surprised the queen in her tears, Madame de Motteville in her skilful retreat, and Molina in her strategy. "The remedy!" she cried delightedly to the queen, as she unceremoniously approached the group.

"What remedy, *Chica*?" said Anne of Austria.

"For your Majesty's sufferings," the former replied.

"Who brings it?" asked Madame de Motteville, eagerly, — "M. Vallot?"

"No; a lady from Flanders."

"From Flanders? Is she Spanish?" inquired the queen.

"I don't know."

"Who sent her?"

"M. Colbert."

"Her name?"

"She did not mention it."

"Her position in life?"

"She will answer that herself."

"Her face?"

"She is masked."

"Go, Molina; go and see!" cried the queen.

"It is needless," suddenly replied a voice, at once firm and gentle in its tone, which proceeded from the other side of the tapestry hangings, — a voice which startled the attendants and made the queen tremble. At the same moment a woman, masked, appeared between the curtains, and before the queen could speak added, "I am connected

with the order of the Béguines of Bruges, and do indeed bring with me the remedy which is certain to effect a cure of your Majesty's complaint."

No one uttered a sound, and the Béguine did not move a step.

"Speak!" said the queen.

"I will when we are alone," was the answer.

Anne of Austria looked at her attendants, who immediately withdrew. The Béguine thereupon advanced a few steps towards the queen, and bowed reverently before her. The queen gazed with increasing mistrust at this woman, who in her turn fixed a pair of brilliant eyes upon the queen through openings in the mask.

"The Queen of France must indeed be very ill," said Anne of Austria, "if it is known at the Béguinage of Bruges that she stands in need of being cured."

"Your Majesty, thank God, is not ill beyond remedy."

"But, tell me, how do you happen to know that I am suffering?"

"Your Majesty has friends in Flanders."

"And these friends have sent you?"

"Yes, Madame."

"Name them to me."

"Impossible, Madame, since your Majesty's memory has not been awakened by your heart."

Anne of Austria looked up, endeavoring to discover through the concealment of the mask and through her mysterious language the name of this person who expressed herself with such familiarity and freedom; then suddenly, wearied by a curiosity at odds with her pride, she said, "You are ignorant, perhaps, that royal personages are never spoken to with the face masked."

"Deign to excuse me, Madame," replied the Béguine, humbly.

"I cannot excuse you ; I will not forgive you if you do not throw your mask aside."

"I have made a vow, Madame, to go to the help of those who are afflicted or suffering, without ever permitting them to behold my face. I might have been able to administer some relief to your body and to your mind ; but since your Majesty forbids me, I will take my leave. Adieu, Madame, adieu !"

These words were uttered with a harmony of tone and respect of manner that destroyed the queen's anger and suspicion, but did not remove her feeling of curiosity. "You are right," she said ; "it ill becomes those who are suffering to reject the means of relief which Heaven sends them. Speak, then ; and may you indeed be able, as you assert you are, to administer relief to my body. Alas ! I think that God is about to make it suffer."

"Let us first speak a little of the mind, if you please," said the Béguine, — "of the mind, which I am sure must also suffer."

"My mind ?"

"There are cancers so insidious in their nature that their very pulsation is invisible. Such cancers, Madame, leave the ivory whiteness of the skin untouched, and marble not the firm, fair flesh with their blue tints ; the physician who bends over the patient's chest hears not, though he listens, the insatiable teeth of the disease grinding its onward progress through the muscles, as the blood flows freely on ; neither iron nor fire has ever destroyed or disarmed the rage of these mortal scourges ; their home is in the mind, which they corrupt ; they grow in the heart until it breaks. Such, Madame, are these other cancers, fatal to queens : are you free from these evils ?"

Anne slowly raised her arm, as dazzling in its perfect

whiteness and as pure in its rounded outlines as it was in the time of her earlier days. "The evils to which you allude," she said, "are the condition of the lives of the high in rank upon earth, to whom Heaven has imparted mind. When those evils become too heavy to be borne, the Lord lightens their burden by penitence and confession. Thus we lay down our burden, and the secrets which oppress us. But forget not that the same sovereign Lord apportions their trials to the strength of his creatures; and my strength is not inferior to my burden. For the secrets of others I have enough of the mercy of Heaven; for my own secrets not so much mercy as my confessor."

"I find you, Madame, as courageous as ever against your enemies; I do not find you showing confidence in your friends."

"Queens have no friends. If you have nothing further to say to me, if you feel yourself inspired by Heaven as a prophetess, leave me, I pray; for I dread the future."

"I should have supposed," said the Béguine, resolutely, "that you would rather dread the past."

Hardly had these words escaped the Béguine's lips, when the queen rose proudly. "Speak!" she cried, in a short, imperious tone of voice; "explain yourself briefly, quickly, entirely; or, if not—"

"Nay, do not threaten me, your Majesty!" said the Béguine, gently. "I have come to you full of compassion and respect; I have come on the part of a friend."

"Prove it, then! Comfort, instead of irritating me."

"Easily enough; and your Majesty will see who is friendly to you. What misfortune has happened to your Majesty during these twenty-three years past?"

"Serious misfortunes, indeed! Have I not lost the king?"

"I speak not of misfortunes of that kind. I wish to ask

you if, since — the birth of the king, — any indiscretion on a friend's part has caused your Majesty distress?"

"I do not understand you," replied the queen, setting her teeth hard together in order to conceal her emotion.

"I will make myself understood, then. Your Majesty remembers that the king was born on the 5th of September, 1638, at quarter-past eleven o'clock."

"Yes," stammered the queen.

"At half-past twelve," continued the Béguine, "the dauphin, who had been baptized by Monseigneur de Meaux in the king's and in your own presence, was acknowledged as the heir of the crown of France. The king then went to the chapel of the old Château de St. Germain to hear the *Te Deum* chanted."

"Quite true, quite true," murmured the queen.

"Your Majesty's confinement took place in the presence of Monsieur, his Majesty's late uncle, of the princes, and of the ladies attached to the court. The king's physician, Bouvard, and Honoré, the surgeon, were stationed in the antechamber; your Majesty slept from three o'clock until seven, I believe?"

"Yes, yes; but you tell me no more than every one else knows as well as you and myself."

"I am now, Madame, approaching that with which very few persons are acquainted. Very few persons, did I say? Alas! I might say two only; for formerly there were but five in all, and for many years past the secret has been assured by the deaths of the principal participators in it. The late king sleeps now with his ancestors; Péronne, the midwife, soon followed him; Laporte is already forgotten."

The queen opened her lips as though about to reply; she felt beneath her icy hand, with which she touched her face, the beads of perspiration upon her brow.

“It was eight o’clock,” pursued the Béguine. “The king was seated at supper, full of joy and happiness; around him on all sides arose wild cries of delight and drinking of healths; the people cheered beneath the balconies; the Swiss Guards, the Musketeers, and the Royal Guards wandered through the city, borne about in triumph by the drunken students. Those boisterous sounds of the general joy disturbed the dauphin, the future king of France, who was quietly lying in the arms of Madame de Hausac, his nurse, and whose eyes, when he should open them, might have observed two crowns at the foot of his cradle. Suddenly your Majesty uttered a piercing cry, and Dame Péronne immediately flew to your bedside.

“The doctors were dining in a room at some distance from your chamber; the palace, abandoned in the general confusion, was without either sentinels or guards. The midwife, having questioned and examined your Majesty, gave a sudden exclamation of surprise, and taking you in her arms, bewildered, almost out of her senses from sheer distress of mind, despatched Laporte to inform the king that her Majesty the Queen wished to see him in her room.

“Laporte, you are aware, Madame, was a man of the most admirable calmness and presence of mind. He did not approach the king as if he were the bearer of alarming intelligence and feeling his importance wished to inspire the terror which he himself experienced; besides, it was not a very terrifying intelligence which awaited the king. At any rate, Laporte, with a smile upon his lips, approached the king’s chair, saying to him, ‘Sire, the queen is very happy, and would be still more so to see your Majesty.’

“On that day Louis XIII. would have given his crown away to the veriest beggar for a ‘God bless you.’ Ani-



mated, light-hearted, and full of gayety, the king rose from the table, and said to those around him, in a tone that Henry IV. might have used, 'Gentlemen, I am going to see my wife.' He came to your bedside, Madame, at the very moment when Dame Péronne presented to him a second prince, as beautiful and healthy as the former, and said, 'Sire, Heaven will not allow the kingdom of France to fall into the female line.' The king, yielding to a first impulse, clasped the child in his arms, and cried, 'Oh, Heaven, I thank thee!'"

At this part of her recital the Béguine paused, observing how intensely the queen was suffering. She had thrown herself back in her chair, and with her head bent forward and her eyes fixed, listened without seeming to hear, and her lips moved convulsively, breathing either a prayer to Heaven or imprecations against the woman before her.

"Ah! do not believe that if there has been but one dauphin in France," exclaimed the Béguine, "if the queen allowed the second child to vegetate far from the throne, — do not believe that she was an unfeeling mother. Oh, no, no! There are those who know the floods of bitter tears she shed; there are those who have known and witnessed the passionate kisses she imprinted on that innocent creature in exchange for the life of misery and gloom to which State policy condemned the twin brother of Louis XIV."

"Oh, Heaven!" murmured the queen, feebly.

"It is known," continued the Béguine, quickly, "that when the king perceived the effect which would result from the existence of two sons, both equal in age and pretensions, he trembled for the welfare of France, for the tranquillity of the State. It is known that the Cardinal de Richelieu, by the direction of Louis XIII., thought over the subject with deep attention, and after an hour's



meditation in his Majesty's cabinet pronounced the following sentence : ' A king is born, to succeed his Majesty. God has sent another, to succeed the first ; but at present we need only the first-born. Let us conceal the second from France, as God has concealed him from his parents themselves. One prince is peace and safety for the State ; two competitors are civil war and anarchy.' "

The queen rose suddenly from her seat, pale as death, her hands clinched together. " You know too much," she said in a hoarse, thick voice, " since you refer to secrets of State. As for the friends from whom you have acquired this secret, they are false and treacherous. You are their accomplice in the crime which is now committed. Now, throw aside your mask, or I will have you arrested by my captain of the Guards. Do not think that this secret terrifies me ! You have obtained it ; you shall restore it to me. It will freeze in your bosom ; neither your secret nor your life belongs to you from this moment."

Anne of Austria, joining gesture to the threat, advanced two steps towards the Béguine. " Learn," said the latter, " to know and value the fidelity, the honor, and the secrecy of the friends you have abandoned." She then suddenly threw aside her mask.

" Madame de Chevreuse ! " exclaimed the queen.

" With your Majesty, the sole living confidante of the secret."

" Ah," murmured Anne of Austria, " come and embrace me, Duchess ! Alas ! you kill your friend in thus trifling with her terrible distress."

The queen, leaning her head upon the shoulder of the old duchess, burst into a flood of bitter tears. " How young you are still ! " said the latter, in a hollow voice ; " you can weep ! "

## CHAPTER IV.

## TWO FRIENDS.

THE queen looked steadily at Madame de Chevreuse, and said : " I believe you just now made use of the word 'happy' in speaking of me. Hitherto, Duchess, I had thought it impossible that a human creature could anywhere be found less happy than the Queen of France."

"Your afflictions, Madame, have indeed been terrible enough ; but by the side of those illustrious misfortunes to which we, two old friends separated by men's malice, were just now alluding, you possess sources of pleasure, slight enough in themselves it may be, but which are greatly envied by the world."

"What are they?" said Anne of Austria, bitterly. "How can you use the word 'pleasure,' Duchess, — you who just now admitted that my body and my mind both are in need of remedies?"

Madame de Chevreuse collected herself for a moment, and then murmured, "How far removed kings are from other people!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that they are so far removed from the vulgar herd that they forget that others ever stand in need of the bare necessities of life. They are like the inhabitant of the African mountain who gazing from the verdant table-land, refreshed by the rills of melted snow, cannot comprehend that the dwellers in the plains below him are perishing from hunger and thirst in the midst of their lands burned up by the heat of the sun."

The queen slightly colored, for she now began to perceive the drift of her friend's remark. "It was very wrong," she said, "to have neglected you."

"Oh, Madame, the king has inherited, it is said, the hatred his father bore me. The king would dismiss me if he knew I were in the Palais-Royal."

"I cannot say that the king is very well disposed towards you, Duchess," replied the queen; "but I could — secretly, you know — " The duchess's disdainful smile produced a feeling of uneasiness in the queen's mind. "Duchess," she hastened to add, "you did perfectly right to come here."

"Thanks, Madame."

"Even were it only to give us the happiness of contradicting the report of your death."

"Has it been said, then, that I was dead?"

"Everywhere."

"And yet my children did not go into mourning."

"Ah! you know, Duchess, the court is very frequently moving about from place to place; we see the gentlemen of Albert de Luynes but seldom, and many things escape our minds in the midst of the preoccupations which constantly engage us."

"Your Majesty ought not to have believed the report of my death."

"Why not? Alas! we are all mortal; and you may perceive how rapidly I — your younger sister, as we used formerly to say — am approaching the tomb."

"If your Majesty had believed me dead, you ought to have been astonished not to have received any communication from me."

"Death not unfrequently takes us by surprise, Duchess."

"Oh, your Majesty, those who are burdened with secrets such as we have just now discussed have always

an urgent desire to divulge them, which they must gratify before they die. Among the preparations for eternity is the task of putting one's papers in order." The queen started. "Your Majesty will be sure to learn in a particular manner the day of my death."

"Why so?"

"Because your Majesty will receive the next day, under several coverings, everything connected with our mysterious correspondence of former times."

"Did you not burn it?" cried Anne, in alarm.

"Traitors only," replied the duchess, "destroy a royal correspondence."

"Traitors, do you say?"

"Yes, certainly; or rather they pretend to destroy, and keep or sell it. The faithful, on the contrary, most carefully secrete such treasures; for it may happen that some day or other they will wish to seek out their queen in order to say to her: 'Madame, I am getting old; my health is fast failing me. For me there is danger of death; for your Majesty, the danger that this secret may be revealed. Take, therefore, this dangerous paper, and burn it yourself.'"

"A dangerous paper? What one?"

"So far as I am concerned, I have but one, it is true; but that is indeed most dangerous in its nature."

"Oh, Duchess, tell me, tell me!"

"A letter dated Tuesday, the 2d of August, 1644, in which you beg me to go to Noisy-le-Sec to see that unhappy child. In your own handwriting, Madame, there are those words, 'that unhappy child!'"

A profound silence ensued. The queen's mind was wandering in the past; Madame de Chevreuse was watching the progress of her scheme. "Yes, unhappy, most unhappy!" murmured Anne of Austria; "how sad the

existence he led, poor child, to finish it in so cruel a manner!"

"Is he dead?" cried the duchess, suddenly, with a curiosity whose sincere accents the queen instinctively detected.

"He died of consumption, died forgotten, died withered and blighted like the flowers a lover has given to his mistress, which she leaves to die secreted in a drawer where she has hidden them from the world."

"Died?" repeated the duchess, with an air of discouragement which would have afforded the queen the most unfeigned delight had it not been tempered in some measure by a mixture of doubt. "Died — at Noisy-le-Sec?"

"Yes, in the arms of his tutor, — a poor, honest man who did not long survive him."

"That can be easily understood. It is so difficult to bear up under the weight of such a loss and such a secret," said Madame de Chevreuse, the irony of which reflection the queen pretended not to perceive. Madame de Chevreuse continued: "Well, Madame, I inquired some years ago at Noisy-le-Sec about this unhappy child. I was told that it was not believed he was dead; and that was my reason for not at once condoling with your Majesty. Oh, certainly, if I had believed it, never should the slightest allusion to so deplorable an event have re-awakened your Majesty's legitimate distress."

"You say that it is not believed that the child died at Noisy?"

"No, Madame."

"What did they say about him, then?"

"They said — But no doubt they were mistaken."

"Nay, speak, speak!"

"They said that one evening about the year 1645 a lady, beautiful and majestic in her bearing, which was

observed notwithstanding the mask and the mantle which concealed her figure, — a lady of rank, of very high rank no doubt, — came in a carriage to the place where the road branches off, — the very same spot, you know, where I awaited news of the young prince when your Majesty was graciously pleased to send me there.”

“ Well, well ? ”

“ That the boy’s tutor, or guardian, took the child to this lady. ”

“ Well, what next ? ”

“ That both the child and his tutor left that part of the country the very next day. ”

“ There ! you see there is some truth in what you relate, since in point of fact the poor child died from a sudden attack of illness, which up to the age of seven years makes the lives of all children, as doctors say, suspended as it were by a thread. ”

“ What your Majesty says is quite true. No one knows it better than you ; no one believes it more than myself. But yet how strange it is — ”

“ What can it now be ? ” thought the queen.

“ The person who gave me these details, who had been sent to inquire after the child’s health — ”

“ Did you confide such a charge to any one else ? Oh, Duchess ! ”

“ Some one as dumb as your Majesty, as dumb as myself ; we will suppose it was myself, Madame. This ‘ some one,’ some months after, passing through Touraine — ”

“ Touraine ! ”

“ Recognized both the tutor and the child too ! I am wrong ; he thought he recognized them, both living, cheerful, happy, and flourishing, — the one in a green old age, the other in the flower of his youth. Judge, after that, what truth can be attributed to the rumors which



are circulated, or what faith, after that, can be placed in anything that may happen in the world. But I am fatiguing your Majesty; it was not my intention, however, to do so; and I will take my leave of you, after renewing to you the assurance of my most respectful devotion."

"Stay, Duchess! Let us first talk a little about yourself."

"Of myself, Madame? I am not worthy that you should bend your looks upon me."

"Why not, indeed? Are you not the oldest friend I have? Are you angry with me, Duchess?"

"I, indeed! What motive could I have? If I had reason to be angry with your Majesty, should I have come here?"

"Duchess, age is fast creeping on us both; we should be united against that death whose approach cannot be far off."

"You overpower me, Madame, with the kindness of your language."

"No one has ever loved or served me as you have done, Duchess."

"Your Majesty remembers it?"

"Always. Duchess, give me a proof of your friendship."

"Ah, Madame, my whole being is devoted to your Majesty."

"The proof I require is that you should ask something of me."

"Ask —"

"Oh, I know you well, — no one is more disinterested, more noble, more truly royal."

"Do not praise me too highly, Madame," said the duchess, becoming uneasy.



"I could never praise you as much as you deserve to be praised."

"And yet, age and misfortune effect a great change in people, Madame."

"So much the better; for the beautiful, the haughty, the adored duchess of former days might have answered me ungratefully, 'I do not wish for anything from you.' Blessed be misfortunes, if they have come to you, since they will have changed you, and you will now perhaps answer me, 'I accept.'"

The duchess's look and smile became more gentle; she was under the charm, and no longer concealed her wishes.

"Speak, dearest!" said the queen; "what do you want?"

"I must first explain to you —"

"Do so unhesitatingly."

"Well, then, your Majesty can confer on me a pleasure unspeakable, a pleasure incomparable."

"What is it?" said the queen, a little distant in her manner, from an uneasiness of feeling produced by this remark. "But do not forget, my good Chevreuse, that I am quite as much under my son's influence as I was formerly under my husband's."

"I will not be too hard, Madame."

"Call me as you used to do; it will be a sweet echo of our happy youth."

"Well, then, my dear mistress, my darling Anne —"

"Do you know Spanish still?"

"Yes."

"Ask me in Spanish, then."

"Here it is: Will your Majesty do me the honor to pass a few days with me at Dampierre?"

"Is that all?" said the queen, stupefied.

"Yes."

"Nothing more than that?"

"Good heavens! Can you possibly imagine that in asking you that, I am not asking you the greatest conceivable favor? If that really be the case, you do not know me. Will you accept?"

"Yes, gladly. And I shall be happy," continued the queen, with some suspicion, "if my presence can in any way be useful to you."

"Useful," exclaimed the duchess, laughing, — "oh, no, no! agreeable, delicious, delightful, — yes, a thousand times yes! You promise me, then?"

"I swear it," said the queen, whereupon the duchess seized her beautiful hand and covered it with kisses. The queen could not help murmuring to herself, "She is a good-hearted woman, and very generous too."

"Will your Majesty consent to wait a fortnight before you come?"

"Certainly; but why?"

"Because," said the duchess, "knowing me to be in disgrace, no one would lend me the hundred thousand crowns which I require to put Dampierre in a state of repair. But when it is known that I require that sum for the purpose of receiving your Majesty at Dampierre properly, all the money in Paris will be at my disposal."

"Ah!" said the queen, gently nodding her head with an air of intelligence, "a hundred thousand crowns! you want a hundred thousand crowns to put Dampierre into repair?"

"Quite as much as that."

"And no one will lend them to you?"

"No one."

"I will lend them to you, if you like, Duchess."

"Oh, I hardly dare accept such a sum!"

"You would be wrong if you did not. Besides, a hun-

dred thousand crowns is really not much. I know but too well that your discreetness has never been properly acknowledged. Push that table a little towards me, Duchess, and I will write you an order on M. Colbert, — no, on M. Fouquet, who is a far more courteous and obliging man.”

“ Will he pay it ? ”

“ If he will not pay it, I will ; but it will be the first time he will have refused me.”

The queen wrote and handed the duchess the order, and afterwards dismissed her with a warm and cheerful embrace.

## CHAPTER V.

## HOW JEAN DE LA FONTAINE WROTE HIS FIRST TALE.

ALL these intrigues are exhausted ; the human mind, so complicated in its exhibitions, has developed itself freely in the three outlines which our recital has afforded. It is not unlikely that in the future we are now preparing, politics and intrigues may still appear ; but the springs by which they work will be so carefully concealed that no one will be able to see aught but flowers and paintings, — just as at a theatre, where a Colossus appears upon the scene walking along moved by the small legs and slender arms of a child concealed within the framework.

We now return to St. Mandé, where the superintendent was in the habit of receiving his select society of epicureans. For some time past the host had been severely tried. Every one in the house was aware of and felt the minister's distress. No more magnificent and recklessly improvident *réunions* ! Finance had been the pretext assigned by Fouquet ; and never was any pretext, as Gourville wittily said, more fallacious, for there was not the slightest appearance of money.

M. Vatel was most resolutely painstaking in keeping up the reputation of the house, and yet the gardeners who supplied the kitchens complained of a ruinous delay. The agents for the supply of Spanish wines frequently sent drafts which no one honored ; fishermen, whom the superintendent engaged on the coast of Normandy, calculated that if they were paid all that was due to them, the

amount would enable them to retire comfortably for the rest of their lives ; fish, which at a later period was to be the cause of Vatel's death, did not arrive at all. However, on the ordinary day of reception, Fouquet's friends flocked in more numerous than ever. Gourville and the Abbé Fouquet talked over money matters, — that is to say, the abbé borrowed a few pistoles from Gourville. Pellisson, seated with his legs crossed, was engaged in finishing the peroration of a speech with which Fouquet was to open the parliament ; and this speech was a masterpiece, because Pellisson wrote it for his friend, — that is to say, he inserted everything in it which the latter would most certainly never have taken the trouble to say of his own accord. Presently Loret and La Fontaine would enter from the garden, engaged in a dispute upon the facility of making verses. The painters and musicians, in their turn, also were hovering near the dining-room. As soon as eight o'clock struck, the supper would be announced ; for the superintendent never kept any one waiting. It was already half-past seven, and the guests were in good appetite.

As soon as all the guests were assembled, Gourville went straight up to Pellisson, awoke him out of his reverie, and led him into the middle of a room the doors of which he had closed. "Well," he said, "anything new?"

Pellisson raised his intelligent and gentle face, and said, "I have borrowed twenty-five thousand livres of my aunt, and I have them here in good money."

"Good!" replied Gourville ; "we want only one hundred and ninety-five thousand livres for the first payment."

"The payment of what?" asked La Fontaine.

"What! absent-minded as usual? Why, it was you who told us that the small estate at Corbeil was going to be sold by one of M. Fouquet's creditors ; and you, also, who proposed that all his friends should subscribe. More

than that, too, it was you who said that you would sell a corner of your house at Château-Thierry in order to furnish your own proportion ; and you now come and ask, ‘ *The payment of what* ’ ? ”

This remark was received with a general laugh, which made La Fontaine blush. “ I beg your pardon,” he said, “ I had not forgotten it, — oh, no ! only — ”

“ Only you remembered nothing about it,” replied Loret.

“ That is the truth ; and the fact is, he is quite right. There is a great difference between forgetting and not remembering.”

“ Well, then,” added Pellisson, “ you bring your mite in the shape of the price of the piece of land you have sold ? ”

“ Sold ? no ! ”

“ And have you not sold the field, then ? ” inquired Gourville, in astonishment, for he knew the poet’s disinterestedness.

“ My wife would not let me,” replied the latter, at which there were fresh bursts of laughter.

“ And yet you went to Château-Thierry for that purpose,” said some one.

“ Certainly I did, and on horseback.”

“ Poor fellow ! ”

“ I had eight different horses, and I was almost jolted to death.”

“ You are an excellent fellow ! And you rested yourself when you arrived there ! ”

“ Rested ! Oh ! of course I did, for I had an immense deal of work to do.”

“ How so ? ”

“ My wife had been flirting with the man to whom I wished to sell the land. The fellow drew back from his bargain, and so I challenged him.”



"Very good ; and you fought ?"

"It seems not."

"You know nothing about it, I suppose ?"

"No ; my wife and her relations interfered in the matter. I was kept a quarter of an hour with my sword in my hand ; but I was not wounded."

"And the adversary ?"

"Neither was the adversary, for he never came on to the field."

"Capital !" cried his friends, from all sides ; "you must have been terribly angry."

"Exceedingly so ; I had caught cold. I returned home, and then my wife began to quarrel with me."

"In real earnest ?"

"Yes, in real earnest ; she threw a loaf of bread at my head, a large loaf."

"And what did you do ?"

"Oh ! I upset the table over her and her guests ; and then I got upon my horse again, and here I am."

Every one had great difficulty in keeping his countenance at the relation of this tragic comedy ; and when the laughter had somewhat ceased, one of the guests present said to him, "Is that all you have brought us back ?"

"Oh, no ! I have an excellent idea in my head."

"What is it ?"

"Have you noticed that there is a good deal of sportive, jesting poetry written in France ?"

"Yes, of course," replied every one.

"And," pursued La Fontaine, "only a very small portion of it is printed."

"The laws are strict, you know."

"That may be ; but a rare article is a dear article, and that is the reason why I have written a small poem extremely licentious."



"Oh, oh, dear poet!"

"Extremely obscene."

"Oh! oh!"

"Extremely cynical."

"Oh, the devil!"

"Yes," continued the poet, with cold indifference; "I have introduced in it the greatest freedom of language I could possibly employ."

Peals of laughter again broke forth, while the poet was thus announcing the quality of his wares. "And," he continued, "I have tried to exceed everything that Boccaccio, Arétin, and other masters of their craft have written in the same style."

"Good God!" cried Pellisson, "it will be condemned!"

"Do you think so?" said La Fontaine, simply. "I assure you, I did not do it on my own account so much as on M. Fouquet's."

This wonderful conclusion raised the mirth of all present to a climax.

"And I have sold the first edition of this little book for eight hundred livres," exclaimed La Fontaine, rubbing his hands together. "Serious and religious books sell at about half that rate."

"It would have been better," said Gourville, laughing; "to have written two religious books instead!"

"It would have been too long, and not amusing enough," replied La Fontaine, tranquilly. "My eight hundred livres are in this little bag; I offer them as my contribution."

As he said this, he placed his offering in the hands of their treasurer. It was then Loret's turn, who gave a hundred and fifty livres. The others stripped themselves in the same way; and the total sum in the purse amounted to forty thousand livres. Never did more generous coins

rattle in the divine balances in which charity weighs good hearts and good intentions against the counterfeit coin of devout hypocrites.

The money was still being counted over when the superintendent noiselessly entered the room. He had heard everything. This man, who had possessed so many millions, who had exhausted all pleasures and all honors, — this generous heart, this inexhaustible brain, — Fouquet, who had, like two burning crucibles, devoured the material and moral substance of the first kingdom in the world, crossed the threshold with his eyes filled with tears, and passed his white and slender fingers through the gold and silver. “Poor offering,” he said, in a tone tender and filled with emotion, “you will disappear in the smallest corner of my empty purse ; but you have filled to overflowing that which nothing can ever exhaust, — my heart. Thank you, my friends, — thank you !” And as he could not embrace every one present, — all were weeping a little, philosophers though they were, — he embraced La Fontaine, saying to him, “Poor fellow ! so you have on my account been beaten by your wife and damned by your confessor ?”

“Oh, it is a mere nothing !” replied the poet. “If your creditors will only wait a couple of years, I shall have written a hundred other tales, which at two editions each will pay off the debt.”

## CHAPTER VI.

## LA FONTAINE AS A NEGOTIATOR.

FOUQUET pressed La Fontaine's hand most warmly, saying to him, "My dear poet, write a hundred other tales, not only for the eighty pistoles which each of them will produce you, but still more to enrich our language with a hundred other masterpieces."

"Oh! oh!" said La Fontaine, with a little air of pride, "you must not suppose that I have brought only this idea and the eighty pistoles to the superintendent."

"Oh! indeed!" was the general acclamation from all parts of the room; "M. de la Fontaine is in funds to-day."

"Heaven bless the idea, if it brings me one or two millions," said Fouquet, gayly.

"Exactly," replied La Fontaine.

"Quick, quick!" cried the assembly.

"Take care!" said Pellisson in La Fontaine's ear. "You have had a most brilliant success up to the present moment; do not go too far."

"Not at all, M. Pellisson; and you, who are a man of taste, will be the first to approve of what I have done."

"Is it a matter of millions?" said Gourville.

"I have fifteen hundred thousand livres here, M. Gourville," he replied, striking himself on the chest.

"The deuce take this Gascon from Château-Thierry!" cried Loret.

"It is not the pocket you should touch, but the brain," said Fouquet.

"Stay a moment, Monsieur the Superintendent !" added La Fontaine ; "you are not procureur-général, —you are a poet."

"True, true !" cried Loret, Conrart, and every person present connected with literature.

"You are, I repeat, a poet and a painter, a sculptor, a friend of the arts and sciences ; but acknowledge that you are no lawyer."

"Oh, I do acknowledge it !" replied M. Fouquet, smiling.

"If you were to be nominated at the Academy, you would refuse, I think."

"I think I should, with all due deference to the academicians."

"Very good ; if therefore you do not wish to belong to the Academy, why do you allow yourself to form one of the parliament ?"

"Oh ! oh !" said Pellisson ; "we are talking politics."

"I wish to know," persisted La Fontaine, "whether the barrister's gown does or does not become M. Fouquet."

"There is no question of the gown at all," retorted Pellisson, annoyed at the laughter of the company.

"On the contrary, the gown is in question," said Loret.

"Take the gown away from the procureur-général," said Conrart, "and we have M. Fouquet left us still, of whom we have no reason to complain ; but as he is no procureur-général without his gown, we agree with M. de la Fontaine, and pronounce the gown to be nothing but a bugbear."

"*Fugiant risus leporesque*," said Loret.

"The smiles and the graces," said some one present.

"That is not the way," said Pellisson, gravely, "that I translate *lepores*."

"How do you translate it ?" said La Fontaine.

"Thus : 'The hares run away as soon as they see M. Fouquet.'"

A burst of laughter, in which the superintendent joined, followed this sally.

"But why hares?" objected Conrart, vexed.

"Because the hare will be the very one who will not be over-pleased to see M. Fouquet retaining the elements of strength which belong to his parliamentary position."

"Oh! oh!" murmured the poets.

"*Quo non ascendam*," said Conrart, "would seem to me impossible with a procureur's gown."

"And it seems so to me without that gown," said the obstinate Pellisson. "What is your opinion, Gourville?"

"I think the gown in question is a very good thing," replied the latter; "but I equally think that a million and a half is far better than the gown."

"And I am of Gourville's opinion," exclaimed Fouquet, stopping the discussion by the expression of his own opinion, which would necessarily bear down all the others.

"A million and a half!" Pellisson grumbled out. "Now I happen to know an Indian fable —"

"Tell it to me," said La Fontaine; "I ought to know it too."

"Tell it, tell it!" said the others.

"There was a tortoise which was as usual well protected by its shell," said Pellisson. "Whenever its enemies threatened it, it took refuge within its covering. One day some one said to it, 'You must feel very hot in such a house as that in the summer, and you are altogether prevented from showing off your graces; here is a snake who will give you a million and a half for your shell.'"

"Good!" said the superintendent, laughing.

"Well, what next?" said La Fontaine, much more interested in the apologue than in its moral.

"The tortoise sold his shell, and remained naked and defenceless. A vulture happened to see him, and being hungry broke the tortoise's back with a blow of his beak and devoured it. The moral is that M. Fouquet should take very good care to keep his gown."

La Fontaine understood the moral seriously. "You forget Æschylus," he said to his adversary.

"What do you mean?"

"Æschylus was bald-headed; and a vulture—your vulture probably—who was a great lover of tortoises mistook at a distance his head for a block of stone, and let a tortoise which was shrunk up in his shell fall upon it."

"Yes, yes, La Fontaine is right," resumed Fouquet, who had become very thoughtful. "Whenever a vulture wishes to devour a tortoise, he well knows how to break his shell; and but too happy is that tortoise to which a snake pays a million and a half for his envelope. If any one were to bring me a generous-hearted snake like the one in your fable, Pellisson, I would give him my shell."

"*Rara avis in terris!*" cried Conrart.

"And like a black swan, is he not?" added La Fontaine; "well, then, the bird in question, black and very rare, is already found."

"Do you mean to say that you have found a purchaser for my post of procureur-général?" exclaimed Fouquet.

"I have, Monsieur."

"But the superintendent has never said that he wished to sell," resumed Pellisson.

"I beg your pardon," said Conrart; "you yourself spoke about it—"

"Yes, I am a witness to that," said Gourville.

"He seems very tenacious about his brilliant idea," said Fouquet, laughing. "Well, La Fontaine, who is the purchaser?"



"A perfect black bird, a counsellor belonging to the parliament, an excellent fellow."

"What is his name?"

"Vanel."

"Vanel!" exclaimed Fouquet, — "Vanel, the husband of —"

"Precisely, — her husband; yes, Monsieur."

"Poor fellow!" said Fouquet, with an expression of great interest; "he wishes to be procureur-général?"

"He wishes to be everything that you have been, Monsieur," said Gourville, "and to do everything that you have done."

"It is very agreeable; tell us all about it, La Fontaine."

"It is very simple. I see him occasionally; and a short time ago I met him walking about on the Place de la Bastille, at the very moment when I was about to take the small carriage to come down here to St. Mandé."

"He must have been watching his wife," interrupted Loret.

"Oh, no!" said La Fontaine; "he is far from being jealous. He accosted me, embraced me, and took me to the inn called L'Image-Saint-Fiacre, and told me all about his troubles."

"He has his troubles, then?"

"Yes; his wife wants to make him ambitious."

"Well, and he told you —"

"That some one had spoken to him about a post in parliament; that M. Fouquet's name had been mentioned; that ever since, Madame Vanel dreams of nothing else but being called Madame the Procureuse-Générale, and that she is dying of it every night she is not dreaming of it."

"The deuce!"

"Poor woman!" said Fouquet.

"Wait a moment! Conrart is always telling me that I

do not know how to conduct matters of business ; you will see how I manage this one."

"Well, go on !"

" 'I suppose you know,' said I to Vanel, 'that the value of a post such as that which M. Fouquet holds is by no means trifling.' 'How much do you imagine it to be ?' he said. 'M. Fouquet, I know, has refused seventeen hundred thousand livres.' 'My wife,' replied Vanel, 'had estimated it at about fourteen hundred thousand.' 'Ready money ?' I asked. 'Yes ; she has sold some property of hers in Guienne, and has received the purchase-money.' "

"That 's a pretty sum to touch all at once," said the Abbé Fouquet, who had not hitherto said a word.

"Poor Madame Vanel !" murmured Fouquet.

Pellisson shrugged his shoulders. "A fiend !" he said in a low voice to Fouquet.

"That may be ; it would be delightful to make use of this fiend's money to repair the injury which an angel has done herself for me."

Pellisson looked with a surprised air at Fouquet, whose thoughts were from that moment fixed upon a fresh object.

"Well !" inquired La Fontaine, "what about my negotiation ?"

"Admirable, my dear poet !"

"Yes," said Gourville ; "but there are some persons who are anxious to have the steed who have not money enough to pay for the bridle."

"And Vanel would draw back from his offer if he were to be taken at his word," continued the Abbé Fouquet.

"I do not believe it," said La Fontaine.

"What do you know about it ?"

"Why, you have not yet heard the *dénouement* of my story."

"If there is a *dénouement*, why do you beat about the bush so much?"

"*Semper ad adventum*. Is that correct?" said Fouquet, with the air of a nobleman who condescends to barbarisms. To this the Latinists present answered with loud applause.

"My *dénouement*," cried La Fontaine, "is that Vanel, that determined blackbird, knowing that I was coming to St. Mandé, implored me to bring him with me, and, if possible, to present him to M. Fouquet."

"So that —"

"So that he is here; I left him in that part of the grounds called Bel-Air. Well, M. Fouquet, what is your reply?"

"Well, it is not fitting that the husband of Madame Vanel should catch cold on my grounds. Send for him, La Fontaine, since you know where he is."

"I will go myself."

"And I will accompany you," said the Abbé Fouquet; "I can carry the money-bags."

"No jesting," said Fouquet, seriously; "let the business be a serious one if it is to be one at all. But, first of all, let us be hospitable. Make my apologies, La Fontaine, to that gentleman, and tell him that I am distressed to have kept him waiting, but that I was not aware he was there."

La Fontaine set off at once, fortunately accompanied by Gourville; for absorbed in his own calculations, the poet would have mistaken the route, and was hurrying as fast as he could towards the village of St. Maur.

Within a quarter of an hour afterwards M. Vanel was introduced into the superintendent's cabinet, the description and details of which have already been given at the beginning of this history. When Fouquet saw him enter,

he called Pellisson, and whispered a few words in his ear :  
“Do not lose a word of what I am going to say. Let all the silver and gold plate, together with the jewels of every description, be packed up in the carriage. You will take the black horses; the jeweller will accompany you; and you will postpone the supper until Madame de Bellière’s arrival.”

“Will it be necessary to notify Madame de Bellière?” said Pellisson.

“No, that will be useless; I will do that.”

“Very well.”

“Go, my friend!”

Pellisson set off, not quite clear as to his friend’s meaning or intention, but confident, like every true friend, in the judgment of the man he was blindly obeying. It is that which constitutes the strength of such men; distrust is awakened only by inferior natures.

Vanel bowed lowly to the superintendent, and was about to begin a speech.

“Be seated, Monsieur!” said Fouquet, politely. “I am told that you wish to purchase a post I hold. How much can you give me for it?”

“It is for you, Monseigneur, to fix the price. I know that offers of purchase have already been made to you for it.”

“Madame Vanel, I have been told, values it at fourteen hundred thousand livres.”

“That is all we have.”

“Can you give me the money immediately?”

“I have not the money with me,” said Vanel, frightened almost by the unpretending simplicity, amounting to greatness, of the man; for he had expected disputes and difficulties, and opposition of every kind.

“When will you be able to have it?”

"Whenever you please, Monseigneur ;" and he began to be afraid that Fouquet was trifling with him.

"If it were not for the trouble you would have in returning to Paris, I would say at once ; but we will arrange that the payment and the signature shall take place at six o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Very good," said Vanel, as cold as ice, and feeling quite bewildered.

"Adieu, M. Vanel! Present my humblest respects to Madame Vanel," said Fouquet, as he rose ; upon which Vanel, who felt the blood rushing up to his head, for he was quite confounded by his success, said seriously to the superintendent, "Will you give me your word, Monseigneur, upon this affair?"

Fouquet turned round his head, saying, "*Pardieu!* and you, Monsieur?"

Vanel hesitated, trembled all over, and at last finished by hesitatingly holding out his hand. Fouquet opened and nobly extended his own. This loyal hand lay for a moment in Vanel's moist, hypocritical palm ; and he pressed it in his own, in order the better to convince himself. The superintendent gently disengaged his hand, as he again said, "Adieu." Vanel then ran hastily to the door, hurried along the vestibules, and fled.

## CHAPTER VII.

## MADAME DE BELLIERE'S PLATE AND DIAMONDS.

WHEN Fouquet had dismissed Vanel, he began to reflect. He said to himself: "A man never can do too much for the woman he has once loved. Marguerite wishes to be the wife of a procureur-général, and why not confer this pleasure upon her? And now that the most scrupulous and sensitive conscience will be unable to reproach me with anything, let my thoughts be bestowed on the woman who loves me. Madame de Bellière ought to be there by this time;" and he turned towards the secret door.

After Fouquet had locked himself in, he opened the subterranean passage, and rapidly hastened towards the means of communicating between the house at Vincennes and his own residence. He had neglected to apprise his friend of his approach by ringing the bell, perfectly assured that she would never fail to be exact at the rendezvous. In fact, the marchioness had arrived, and was waiting. The noise the superintendent made aroused her; she ran to take from under the door the letter which he had thrust there, and which simply said, "Come, Marchioness; we are waiting supper for you." With her heart filled with happiness, Madame de Bellière ran to her carriage in the Avenue de Vincennes; in a few minutes she was holding out her hand to Gourville, who was standing at the entrance, where, in order the better to please his master, he had stationed himself to watch her arrival. She had not observed that Fouquet's black horses had arrived at



the same time, smoking and covered with foam, having returned to St. Mandé with Pellisson and the very jeweller to whom Madame de Bellière had sold her plate and her jewels. Pellisson introduced the goldsmith into the cabinet, which Fouquet had not yet left. The superintendent thanked him for having been good enough to regard as a simple deposit in his hands the valuable property which he had had every right to sell. He cast his eyes on the total of the account, which amounted to thirteen hundred thousand livres. Then, going to his desk, he wrote an order for fourteen hundred thousand livres, payable at sight, at his treasury, before twelve o'clock the next day.

"A hundred thousand livres' profit!" cried the goldsmith. "Oh, Monseigneur, what generosity!"

"Nay, nay, not so, Monsieur," said Fouquet, touching him on the shoulder; "there are certain kindnesses which can never be repaid. The profit is about that which you would have made; but the interest of your money still remains to be arranged;" and saying this, he unfastened from his sleeve a diamond button, which the goldsmith himself had often valued at three thousand pistoles. "Take this," he said to the goldsmith, "in remembrance of me; and farewell! You are an honest man."

"And you, Monseigneur," cried the goldsmith, completely overcome, "are a grand nobleman!"

Fouquet let the worthy goldsmith pass out of the room by a secret door, and then went to receive Madame de Bellière, who was already surrounded by all the guests. The marchioness was always beautiful, but now her loveliness was dazzling.

"Do you not think, gentlemen," said Fouquet, "that Madame is incomparably beautiful this evening? And do you happen to know why?"

"Because Madame is the most beautiful of women," said some one.

"No ; but because she is the best. And yet — "

"Yet?" said the marchioness, smiling.

"And yet, all the jewels which Madame is wearing this evening are nothing but false stones."

At this remark the marchioness blushed most painfully.

"Oh ! oh !" exclaimed all the guests ; "that can very well be said of one who has the finest diamonds in Paris."

"Well?" said Fouquet to Pellisson, in a low tone.

"Well, at last I have understood you," returned the latter ; "and you have done well."

"That is pleasant," said the superintendent, with a smile.

"Supper is ready, Monseigneur," said Vatel, with majestic air and tone.

The crowd of guests hurried more rapidly than is customary at ministerial entertainments towards the banqueting-room, where a magnificent spectacle presented itself. Upon the buffets, upon the side-tables, upon the supper-table itself, in the midst of flowers and light, glittered most dazzlingly the richest and most costly gold and silver plate that was ever seen, — relics of those ancient magnificent productions which the Florentine artists, whom the Medici family had patronized, had sculptured, chased, and cast for the purpose of holding flowers, at a time when gold yet existed in France. These hidden marvels, which had been buried during the civil wars, had timidly reappeared during the intervals of that war of good taste called the Fronde, — when noblemen, fighting against noblemen, killed but did not pillage one another. All that plate had Madame de Bellière's arms engraved upon it. "Look !" cried La Fontaine, "here is a P and a B."

But the most remarkable object present was the cover which Fouquet had assigned to the marchioness. Near her

was a pyramid of diamonds, sapphires, emeralds, antique cameos ; sardonyx stones, carved by the old Greeks of Asia Minor, with mountings of Mysian gold ; curious mosaics of ancient Alexandria, mounted in silver ; and massive Egyptian bracelets lay heaped up in a large plate of Palissy ware, supported by a tripod of gilt bronze which had been sculptured by Benvenuto. The marchioness turned pale as she recognized what she had never expected to see again. A profound silence seemed to seize upon every one of the restless and excited guests. Fouquet did not even make a sign in dismissal of the richly liveried servants who crowded like bees round the huge buffets and other tables in the room. "Gentlemen," he said, "all this plate which you behold once belonged to Madame de Bellière, who having observed one of her friends in great distress, sent all this gold and silver, together with the heap of jewels now before her, to her goldsmith. This noble conduct of a devoted friend can well be understood by such friends as you. Happy, indeed, is that man who sees himself loved in such a manner ! Let us drink to the health of Madame de Bellière."

A tremendous burst of applause followed his words, and made poor Madame de Bellière sink back dumb and breathless on her seat. "And then," added Pellisson, whom all nobleness aroused and all beauty charmed, "let us also drink to the health of him who inspired Madame's noble conduct ; for such a man is worthy of being worthily loved."

It was now the marchioness's turn. She rose, pale and smiling ; and as she held out her glass with a faltering hand, and her trembling fingers touched those of Fouquet, her look, full of love, found its reflection and response in that of her ardent and generous-hearted lover.

Begun in this manner, the supper soon became a *fête*.

No one sought for wit, because no one was without it. La Fontaine forgot his Gorgny wine, and allowed Vatel to reconcile him to the wines of the Rhone and those from the shores of Spain. The Abbé Fouquet became so good-natured that Gourville said to him, "Take care, Monsieur the Abbé! If you are so tender, you will be eaten."

The hours passed away so joyously that, contrary to his usual custom, the superintendent did not leave the table before the end of the dessert. He smiled upon his friends, delighted as a man is whose heart becomes intoxicated before his head; and for the first time he looked at the clock. Suddenly a carriage rolled into the courtyard; and, strange to say, it was heard high above the noise of the mirth which prevailed. Fouquet listened attentively, and then turned his eyes towards the antechamber. It seemed as if he could hear a step passing across it, and as if this step, instead of touching the ground, pressed upon his heart. Involuntarily his foot parted company with the foot which Madame de Bellière had rested on his for two hours.

"M. d'Herblay, Bishop of Vannes!" the usher announced; and Aramis's grave and thoughtful face appeared in the door-way, between the remains of two garlands, the thread of which the flame of a lamp had just burned.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## M. DE MAZARIN'S RECEIPT.

FOUQUET would have uttered an exclamation of delight on seeing another friend arrive, if the cold air and constrained appearance of Aramis had not restored all his reserve. "Are you going to join us at our dessert?" he asked. "And yet you would be frightened, perhaps, at the noise we madcaps are making."

"Monseigneur," replied Aramis, respectfully, "I will begin by begging you to excuse me for having interrupted this merry meeting; and then I will beg you to give me, after your pleasure, a moment's audience on matters of business."

As the word "business" had aroused the attention of some of the epicureans present, Fouquet rose, saying, "Business first of all, M. d'Herblay; we are too happy when matters of business arrive only at the end of a meal."

As he said this, Fouquet took the hand of Madame de Bellière, who looked at him with a kind of uneasiness, and then led her to an adjoining salon, after having recommended her to the most reasonable of his guests. And then, taking Aramis by the arm, the superintendent led him towards his cabinet.

Aramis, on reaching the cabinet, forgot respect and etiquette; he threw himself into a chair, saying, "Guess whom I have seen this evening?"

"My dear chevalier, every time you begin in that manner I am sure to hear you announce something disagreeable."

"Well, and this time you will not be mistaken, either, my dear friend," replied Aramis.

"Do not keep me in suspense," added the superintendent, phlegmatically.

"Well, then, I have seen Madame de Chevreuse."

"The old duchess, do you mean?"

"Yes."

"Her ghost, perhaps?"

"No, no; the old she-wolf herself."

"Without teeth?"

"Possibly, but not without claws."

"Well! what harm can she meditate against me? I am no miser, with women who are not prudes. Generosity is a quality that is always prized, even by the woman who no longer dares to provoke love."

"Madame de Chevreuse knows very well that you are not avaricious, since she wishes to draw some money out of you."

"Indeed! under what pretext?"

"Oh, pretexts are never wanting with her! Let me tell you what hers is. It seems that the duchess has a good many letters of M. de Mazarin's in her possession."

"I am not surprised at that, for the prelate was gallant enough."

"Yes; but these letters have nothing whatever to do with the prelate's love-affairs. They concern, it is said, financial matters."

"And accordingly they are less interesting."

"Do you not suspect what I mean?"

"Not at all."

"You have never heard that there was a charge of embezzlement?"

"Yes, a hundred, nay, a thousand times. Since I have been engaged in public matters I have hardly heard any-



thing else but that, — just as in your own case when you, a bishop, are charged with impiety, or a musketeer, with cowardice. The very thing of which they are always accusing ministers of finance is the embezzlement of public funds.”

“Very good. But let us specify ; for according to the duchess, M. de Mazarin specifies.”

“Let us see what he specifies.”

“Something like a sum of thirteen million livres, the disposal of which it would be very embarrassing for you to disclose.”

“Thirteen millions !” said the superintendent, stretching himself in his arm-chair, in order to enable him the more comfortably to look up towards the ceiling, — “thirteen millions ! I am trying to remember them out of all those I have been accused of stealing.”

“Do not laugh, my dear monsieur ; it is serious. It is certain that the duchess has certain letters in her possession ; and these letters must be genuine, since she wished to sell them to me for five hundred thousand livres.”

“Oh, one can have a very tolerable calumny for such a sum as that !” replied Fouquet. “Ah ! now I know what you mean ;” and he began to laugh heartily.

“So much the better,” said Aramis, a little reassured.

“I remember the story of those thirteen millions now. Yes, yes, I remember them quite well.”

“I am delighted to hear it ; tell me about them.”

“Well, then, one day Signor Mazarin, Heaven rest his soul ! made a profit of thirteen millions upon a concession of lands in the Valtelline ; he cancelled them in the registry of receipts, sent them to me, and then made me advance them to him for war expenses.”

“Very good ; then there is no doubt of their proper disbursement ?”

"No; the cardinal placed them under my name, and gave me a receipt."

"You have the receipt?"

"Of course," said Fouquet, as he quietly rose from his chair, and went to his large ebony bureau, inlaid with mother-of-pearl and gold.

"What I most admire in you," said Aramis, with an air of great satisfaction, "is your memory, in the first place; then, your self-possession; and finally, the perfect order which prevails with you, — you, a poet *par excellence*."

"Yes," said Fouquet, "I am orderly out of a spirit of idleness, to save myself the trouble of looking after things; and so I know that Mazarin's receipt is in the third drawer under the letter M. I open the drawer, and place my hand upon the very paper I need. In the night, without a light, I could find it;" and with a confident hand he felt the bundle of papers which were piled up in the open drawer. "Nay, more than that," he continued, "I remember the paper as if I saw it. It is thick, somewhat crumpled, with gilt edges. Mazarin had made a blot upon the figure of the date. Ah!" he said, "the paper knows we are talking about it, and that we want it very much, and so it hides itself out of the way." As the superintendent looked into the drawer, Aramis rose from his seat. "This is very singular," said Fouquet.

"Your memory is treacherous, my dear monseigneur; look in another drawer."

Fouquet took out the bundle of papers, and turned them over once more; he then became very pale.

"Don't confine your search to that drawer," said Aramis; "look elsewhere."

"Quite useless. I have never made a mistake. No one but myself arranges any papers of mine of this nature; no

one but myself ever opens this drawer, of which, besides, no one but myself is aware of the secret."

"What do you conclude, then?" said Aramis, agitated.

"That Mazarin's receipt has been stolen from me. Madame de Chevreuse was right, Chevalier; I have appropriated the public funds; I have robbed the State coffers of thirteen millions of money; I am a thief, M. d'Herblay."

"Nay, nay; do not get irritated, do not get excited!"

"And why not, Chevalier? Surely there is every reason for it. If the legal proceedings are well arranged, and a judgment is given in accordance with them, your friend the superintendent can follow to Montfaucon his colleague Enguerrand de Marigny and his predecessor Samblançay."

"Oh," said Aramis, smiling, "not so fast!"

"And why not? Why not so fast? What do you suppose Madame de Chevreuse will have done with those letters, — for you refused them, I suppose?"

"Yes; at once. I suppose that she went and sold them to M. Colbert."

"Well?"

"I said I supposed so. I might have said I was sure of it, for I had her followed; and when she left me, she returned to her own house, went out by a back door, and proceeded straight to the intendant's house in the Rue Croix-des-Petits-Champs."

"Legal proceedings will be instituted, then scandal and dishonor will follow; and all will fall upon me like a thunderbolt, blindly, harshly, pitilessly."

Aramis approached Fouquet, who sat trembling in his chair, close to the open drawers; he placed his hand on his shoulder, and in an affectionate tone of voice said, "Do not forget that the position of M. Fouquet can in no way be compared to that of Samblançay or of Marigny."

"And why not, in Heaven's name?"

"Because the proceedings against those ministers were determined, completed, and the sentence carried out; while in your case the same thing cannot take place."

"Another blow! Why not? A peculator is, under any circumstances, a criminal."

"Those criminals who know how to find a safe asylum are never in danger."

"What! Make my escape, — fly?"

"No; I do not mean that. You forget that all such proceedings originate in the parliament; that they are instituted by the procureur-général, and that you are the procureur-général. You see that unless you wish to condemn yourself —"

"Oh!" cried Fouquet suddenly, dashing his fist upon the table.

"Well, what? What is the matter?"

"I am procureur-général no longer."

Aramis at this reply became as livid as death; he pressed his hands together convulsively, and with a wild, haggard look, which almost annihilated Fouquet, said, laying a stress upon every syllable, "You are procureur-général no longer, do you say?"

"No."

"Since when?"

"Since four or five hours ago."

"Take care!" interrupted Aramis, coldly. "I do not think you are in full possession of your senses, my friend; collect yourself!"

"I tell you," returned Fouquet, "that a little while ago some one came to me, brought by my friends, to offer me fourteen hundred thousand livres for the appointment, and that I have sold it."

Aramis looked as if he had been thunder-stricken; the

intelligent and mocking expression of his countenance was changed to an expression of gloom and terror which had more effect upon the superintendent than all the exclamations and speeches in the world. "You had need of money, then?" he said at last.

"Yes; to discharge a debt of honor;" and in a few words he gave Aramis an account of Madame de la Bellière's generosity, and of the manner in which he had thought he ought to repay that generosity.

"Yes," said Aramis; "that is, indeed, a fine trait. What has it cost?"

"Exactly the fourteen hundred thousand livres, — the price of my appointment."

"Which you received in that manner, without reflection. Oh, imprudent friend!"

"I have not yet received the amount; but I shall to-morrow."

"It is not yet completed, then?"

"It must be carried out, though; for I have given the goldsmith, for twelve o'clock to-morrow, an order upon my treasury, into which the purchaser's money will be paid at six or seven o'clock."

"Heaven be praised!" cried Aramis, clapping his hands together; "nothing is yet completed, since you have not been paid."

"But the goldsmith?"

"You shall receive the fourteen hundred thousand livres from me at a quarter before twelve."

"Stay a moment! It is at six o'clock, this very morning, that I am to sign."

"Oh, I tell you that you will not sign!"

"I have given my word, Chevalier."

"If you have given it, you will take it back again; that is all."

“Ah ! what are you saying to me ?” cried Fouquet, in a most expressive tone. “Fouquet recall his word, after it has been once pledged !”

Aramis replied to the almost stern look of the minister with a look full of anger. “Monsieur,” he said, “I believe I have deserved to be called a man of honor, have I not ? As a soldier I have risked my life five hundred times ; as a priest I have rendered great services, both to the State and to my friends. The value of a word, once passed, is estimated according to the worth of the man who gives it. So long as it is in his own keeping it is of the purest, finest gold ; when his wish to keep it has passed away, it is a two-edged sword. With that word, therefore, he defends himself as with an honorable weapon, considering that when he disregards his word, — that man of honor, — he endangers his life ; he courts the risk rather than that his adversary should secure advantages. And then, Monsieur, he appeals to Heaven and to justice.”

Fouquet bent down his head, as he replied : “I am a poor Breton, opinionated and commonplace ; my mind admires and fears yours. I do not say that I keep my word from a moral instinct ; I keep it, if you like, by force of habit. But at all events, the ordinary run of men are simple enough to admire this custom of mine. It is my single virtue ; leave me the honor of it.”

“And so you are determined to sign the sale of the office which would defend you against all your enemies ?”

“Yes, I shall sign.”

“You will deliver yourself up, then, bound hand and foot, from a false notion of honor, which the most scrupulous casuists would disdain ?”

“I shall sign,” repeated Fouquet.

Aramis sighed deeply, and looked all round him with the impatient gesture of a man who would gladly dash



something to pieces, as a relief to his feelings. "We have still one means left," he said; "and I trust you will not refuse to make use of that?"

"Certainly not, if it be loyal and honorable, — as everything is, in fact, which you propose."

"I know nothing more loyal than a renunciation of your purchaser. Is he a friend of yours?"

"Certainly; but —"

"'But'! — if you allow me to manage the affair, I do not despair."

"Oh, you shall be absolute master!"

"With whom are you in treaty? What man is it?"

"I am not aware whether you know the parliament?"

"Most of its members. One of the presidents, perhaps?"

"No; only a counsellor —"

"Ah, ah!"

"Who is named Vanel?"

Aramis became purple. "Vanel!" he cried, rising abruptly from his seat, — "Vanel! the husband of Marguerite Vanel?"

"Exactly."

"Of your former mistress?"

"Yes, my dear fellow. She is anxious to be Madame the Procureuse-Général. I certainly owed poor Vanel that slight concession; and I am a gainer by it, since I at the same time confer a pleasure on his wife."

Aramis walked straight to Fouquet, and took hold of his hand. "Do you know," he said very calmly, "the name of Madame Vanel's new lover?"

"Ah! she has a new lover, then? I was not aware of it; no, I have no idea what his name is."

"His name is M. Jean Baptiste Colbert; he is intendant of the finances; he lives in the Rue Croix-des-Petits-Champs, where Madame de Chevreuse has this

evening carried Mazarin's letters, which she wishes to sell."

"Gracious Heaven!" murmured Fouquet, passing his hand across his forehead, from which the perspiration was starting.

"You now begin to understand, do you not?"

"That I am lost, — yes."

"Do you now think it worth while to be so scrupulous with regard to keeping your word?"

"Yes," said Fouquet.

"These obstinate people always contrive matters in such a way that one cannot but admire them," murmured Aramis.

Fouquet held out his hand to him; and at the very moment a richly ornamented tortoise-shell clock, supported by golden figures, which was standing on a console table opposite to the fireplace, struck six. The sound of a door opening in the vestibule was heard.

"M. Vanel," said Gourville, at the door of the cabinet, "inquires if Monseigneur can receive him."

Fouquet turned his eyes from those of Aramis and replied, "Let M. Vanel come in."

## CHAPTER IX.

## M. COLBERT'S ROUGH DRAUGHT.

VANEL, who entered at this stage of the conversation, was for Aramis and Fouquet the full stop which terminates a sentence. But, for Vanel, Aramis's presence in Fouquet's cabinet had quite another signification. At his first step into the room he fixed upon the delicate yet firm countenance of the Bishop of Vannes a look of astonishment which soon became one of scrutinizing inquiry. As for Fouquet, a true politician, — that is to say, complete master of himself, — he had already, by the energy of his own resolute will, contrived to remove from his face all traces of the emotion which Aramis's revelation had occasioned. He was no longer, therefore, a man overwhelmed by misfortune and reduced to expedients; he held his head proudly erect, and extended his hand with a gesture of welcome to Vanel. He was prime minister; he was in his own house. Aramis knew the superintendent well; the delicacy of the feelings of his heart and the exalted nature of his mind could no longer surprise him. He confined himself, then, for the moment — intending to resume later an active part in the conversation — to the difficult rôle of a man who looks on and listens in order to learn and understand.

Vanel was visibly overcome, and advanced into the middle of the cabinet, bowing to everything and everybody. "I am come," he said.

"You are exact, M. Vanel," returned Fouquet.

"In matters of business, Monseigneur," replied Vanel, "I look upon exactitude as a virtue."

"No doubt, Monsieur."

"I beg your pardon," interrupted Aramis, indicating Vanel with his finger, but addressing himself to Fouquet; "this is the gentleman, I believe, who has come about the purchase of your appointment?"

"Yes, I am," replied Vanel, astonished at the extremely haughty tone with which Aramis had put the question; "but in what way am I to address you, who do me the honor —"

"Call me Monseigneur," replied Aramis, dryly.

Vanel bowed.

"Come, gentlemen," said Fouquet, "a truce to these ceremonies! Let us proceed to business."

"Monseigneur sees," said Vanel, "that I am waiting his pleasure."

"On the contrary, it is I who wait," replied Fouquet.

"What for, may I be permitted to ask, Monseigneur?"

"I thought that perhaps you would have something to say."

"Oh," said Vanel to himself, "he has reflected on the matter, and I am lost!" But resuming his courage he continued, "No, Monseigneur, nothing, — absolutely nothing more than what I said to you yesterday, and which I am ready to repeat now."

"Come, now, tell me frankly, M. Vanel, is not the affair rather a burdensome one for you?"

"Certainly, Monseigneur; fourteen hundred thousand livres is an important sum."

"So important, indeed," said Fouquet, "that I have reflected —"

"You have been reflecting, do you say, Monseigneur?" exclaimed Vanel, anxiously.

"Yes ; that you might not yet be in a position to purchase."

"Oh, Monseigneur !"

"Do not make yourself uneasy on that score, M. Vanel ! I shall not blame you for a failure in your word, which evidently will be due to inability on your part."

"Oh, yes, Monseigneur, you would blame me, and you would be right in doing so," said Vanel : "for a man must be either imprudent or a fool to undertake engagements which he cannot keep ; and I, at least, have always regarded a thing agreed upon as a thing done."

Fouquet colored, while Aramis uttered a "Hum !" of impatience.

"You would be wrong to emphasize such notions as those, Monsieur," said the superintendent : "for a man's mind is variable and full of little caprices, very excusable, and sometimes very worthy of respect ; and a man may have wished for something yesterday, and to-day have changed his mind."

Vanel felt a cold sweat trickle down his face. "Monseigneur !" he muttered.

Aramis, who was delighted to find the superintendent carrying on the debate with such clearness and precision, stood leaning his arm upon the marble top of a console table, and began to play with a small gold knife with a malachite handle. Fouquet did not hasten to reply ; but after a moment's pause, "Come, my dear M. Vanel," he said, "I will explain to you how I am situated." Vanel began to tremble. "Yesterday I wished to sell —"

"Monseigneur has done more than wish to sell ; Monseigneur has sold."

"Well, well, that may be so ; but to-day I ask you, as a favor, to restore me my word which I pledged you."

"I received your word as a perfect assurance that it would be kept."

"I know that; and that is the reason why I now entreat you, — do you understand me? — I entreat you to restore it to me."

Fouquet suddenly paused. The words "I entreat you," the force of which he did not immediately perceive, seemed almost to choke him as he uttered it. Aramis, still playing with his knife, fixed a look upon Vanel which seemed to search the inmost recess of his heart.

Vanel simply bowed as he said, "I am overcome, Monseigneur, at the honor you do me to consult me upon a matter of business which is already completed; but —"

"Nay, do not say *but*, dear M. Vanel."

"Alas! Monseigneur, you see," he said, as he opened a large pocket-book, "I have brought the money with me, — the whole sum, I mean: And here, Monseigneur, is the contract of sale which I have just effected of a property belonging to my wife. The order is authentic in every way, the necessary signatures have been attached to it, and it is made payable at sight; it is ready money. In one word, the affair is complete."

"My dear M. Vanel, there is not a matter of business in this world, however important it may be, which cannot be postponed in order to oblige —"

"Certainly," said Vanel, awkwardly.

"To oblige a man who by that means might and would be made a devoted friend."

"Certainly, Monseigneur."

"And the more completely a friend, M. Vanel, in proportion to the importance of the service rendered, since the value of the service he had received would have been so considerable. Well, what do you decide?"

Vanel preserved silence. In the mean time Aramis had



continued his observations. Vanel's narrow face, his deeply sunk orbits, his arched eyebrows, had revealed to the Bishop of Vannes the type of an avaricious and ambitious character. Aramis's method was to oppose one passion by another. He saw Fouquet defeated, demoralized ; he threw himself into the contest with new weapons. "Excuse me, Monseigneur," he said ; "you forget to show M. Vanel that his own interests are diametrically opposed to this renunciation of the sale."

Vanel looked at the bishop with astonishment ; he had hardly expected to find an auxiliary in him. Fouquet also paused to listen to the bishop.

"Do you not see," continued Aramis, "that M. Vanel, in order to purchase your appointment, has been obliged to sell a property which belongs to his wife? Well, that is no slight matter ; for one cannot displace fourteen or fifteen hundred thousand livres, as he has done, without considerable loss and very serious inconvenience."

"Perfectly true," said Vanel, whose secret Aramis had with his keen-sighted gaze wrung from the bottom of his heart.

"Such embarrassments," pursued Aramis, "resolve themselves into expenses ; and when one has a large disbursement to make, expenses are to be considered."

"Yes, yes," said Fouquet, who began to understand Aramis's meaning.

Vanel remained silent ; he, too, had understood him.

Aramis observed his coldness of manner and his silence. "Very good," he said to himself, "you are waiting, I see, until you know the amount ; but do not fear ! I shall send you such a flight of crowns that you cannot but capitulate on the spot."

"We must offer M. Vanel a hundred thousand crowns at once," said Fouquet, carried away by his generous feelings.

The sum was a good one. A prince, even, would have been satisfied with such a bonus. A hundred thousand crowns at that period was the dowry of a king's daughter.

Vanel, however, did not move.

"He is a rascal!" thought the bishop; "we must offer the five hundred thousand livres at once!" and he made a sign to Fouquet.

"You seem to have spent more than that, dear M. Vanel," said the superintendent. "The price of money is enormous. You must have made a great sacrifice in selling your wife's property. Well, what can I have been thinking of? It is an order for five hundred thousand livres that I am about to sign for you; and even in that case I shall feel that I am greatly indebted to you."

There was not a single gleam of delight or desire on Vanel's face, which remained impassive; not a muscle of it changed in the slightest degree. Aramis cast a look of despair at Fouquet, and then, going straight up to Vanel and taking hold of him by the coat with the gesture used by men of high rank, he said: "M. Vanel, it is neither the inconvenience, nor the displacement of your money, nor the sale of your wife's property even, that you are thinking of at this moment; it is something still more important. I can well understand it; so pay particular attention to what I am going to say."

"Yes, Monseigneur," Vanel replied, beginning to tremble. The fire in the eyes of the prelate scorched him.

"I offer you, therefore, in the superintendent's name, not three hundred thousand livres, nor five hundred thousand, but a million. A million,—do you understand me?" he added, as he shook him nervously.

"A million!" repeated Vanel, as pale as death.

"A million; in other words, at the present rate of interest, an income of seventy thousand livres!"

"Come, Monsieur," said Fouquet, "you can hardly refuse that. Answer! Do you accept?"

"Impossible!" murmured Vanel.

Aramis bit his lips, and something like a white cloud passed over his face. That cloud indicated thunder. He still kept his hold on Vanel. "You have purchased the appointment for fifteen hundred thousand livres, I think? Well, we will give you these fifteen hundred thousand livres; by paying M. Fouquet a visit, and shaking hands with him, you will have become a gainer of a million and a half. You get honor and profit at the same time, M. Vanel."

"I cannot do it," said Vanel, hoarsely.

"Very well," replied Aramis, who had grasped Vanel so tightly by the coat that when he let go his hold Vanel staggered back a few paces, — "very well; one can now see clearly enough your object in coming here."

"Yes," said Fouquet, "one can easily see that."

"But —" said Vanel, attempting to stand erect before the weakness of these two men of honor.

"The fellow presumes to speak!" said Aramis, with the tone of an emperor.

"Fellow?" repeated Vanel.

"The wretch, I meant to say," added the prelate, who had now resumed his usual self-possession. "Come, Monsieur, produce your deed of sale! You should have it there, in one of your pockets, already prepared, as an assassin holds his pistol or his dagger concealed under his cloak."

Vanel began to mutter something.

"Enough!" cried Fouquet. "Where is this deed?"

Vanel tremblingly searched in his pockets; and as he drew out his pocket-book, a paper fell out of it, while Vanel offered the other to Fouquet. Aramis pounced

upon the paper which had fallen out, the handwriting of which he recognized.

"I beg your pardon," said Vanel; "that is a rough draught of the deed."

"I see that very clearly," retorted Aramis, with a smile more cutting than a lash of a whip would have been; "and what surprises me is that this draught is in M. Colbert's handwriting. Look, Monseigneur, look!" And he handed the paper to Fouquet, who recognized the truth of his remark; for, covered with erasures, with inserted words, the margins filled with additions, this deed — an open proof of Colbert's plot — had just revealed everything to its unhappy victim.

"Well!" murmured Fouquet.

Vanel, completely humiliated, seemed as if he were looking for some deep hole where he could hide himself.

"Well!" said Aramis, "if your name were not Fouquet, and if your enemy's name were not Colbert, — if you had to deal only with this mean thief before you, I should say to you, 'Repudiate it!' Such a proof as this absolves you from your word. But these fellows would think you were afraid; they would fear you less than they do; therefore sign, Monseigneur!" and he held out a pen towards him.

Fouquet pressed Aramis's hand; but instead of the deed which Vanel handed to him, he took the rough draught of it.

"No, not that paper," said Aramis, hastily; "this is the one. The other is too precious a document for you to part with."

"No, no!" replied Fouquet. "I will sign upon the paper of M. Colbert; and I write, 'The writing is approved.'" He then signed, and said, "Here it is, M.

Vanel ;” and the latter seized the paper, laid down his money, and was about to retreat.

“One moment !” said Aramis. “Are you quite sure the exact amount is there ? It ought to be counted over, M. Vanel, particularly since it is money which M. Colbert presents to the ladies. Ah, that worthy M. Colbert is not so generous as M. Fouquet !” and Aramis, spelling every word, every letter of the order to pay, distilled his wrath and his contempt, drop by drop, upon the miserable wretch, who had to submit to this torture for a quarter of an hour. He was then dismissed, not in words, but by a gesture, as one dismisses a beggar or discharges a menial.

As soon as Vanel had gone, the minister and the prelate, their eyes fixed on each other, remained silent for a few moments.

“Well,” said Aramis, the first to break the silence, “to what can that man be compared, who, entering into a conflict with an enemy armed from head to foot, thirsting for his life, strips himself, throws down his arms, and sends kisses to his adversary ? Good faith, M. Fouquet, is a weapon which scoundrels very frequently make use of against men of honor, and it answers their purpose. Men of honor ought in their turn, also, to make use of bad faith against such scoundrels. You would soon see how strong they would become without ceasing to be men of honor.”

“It would be rascally conduct,” replied Fouquet.

“Not at all ; it would be merely coquetting or playing with the truth. And now, since you have finished with this Vanel, since you have deprived yourself of the happiness of confounding him by repudiating your word, and since you have given up, to be used against yourself, the only weapon which can ruin us —”

“My dear friend,” said Fouquet, mournfully, “you are like the teacher of philosophy whom La Fontaine was tell-



ing us about the other day : he saw a child drowning, and began to read him a lecture divided into three heads."

Aramis smiled as he said, "Philosophy, — yes ; teacher, — yes ; a drowning child, — yes ; but a child that can be saved, — you shall see. And, first of all, let us talk about business." Fouquet looked at him with an air of astonishment. "Did you not some time ago speak to me about an idea you had of giving a *fête* at Vaux?"

"Oh," said Fouquet, "that was when affairs were flourishing !"

"A *fête*, I believe, to which the king, without prompting, invited himself?"

"No, no, my dear prelate ; a *fête* to which M. Colbert advised the king to invite himself!"

"Ah ! exactly ; as it would be a *fête* of so costly a character that you would be ruined in giving it?"

"Precisely so. In other times, as I said just now, I had a kind of pride in showing my enemies the fruitfulness of my resources ; I felt it a point of honor to strike them with amazement, in creating millions under circumstances where they had imagined nothing but bankruptcies possible. But at the present day I am arranging my accounts with the State, with the king, with myself ; and I must now become a mean, stingy man. I shall be able to prove to the world that I can act or operate with my deniers as I used to do with my bags of pistoles ; and beginning to-morrow, my equipages shall be sold, my houses mortgaged, my expenses contracted."

"Beginning with to-morrow," interrupted Aramis, quietly, "you will occupy yourself, without the slightest delay, with your *fête* at Vaux, which must hereafter be spoken of with the most magnificent productions of your most prosperous days."

"You are mad, Chevalier d'Herblay."



"I? You do not think that."

"What do you mean, then? Do you not know that a *fête* at Vaux, of the very simplest possible character, would cost four or five millions?"

"I do not speak of a *fête* of the very simplest possible character, my dear superintendent."

"But since the *fête* is to be given to the king," replied Fouquet, who misunderstood Aramis's idea, "it cannot be simple."

"Just so; it ought to be on a scale of the most unbounded magnificence."

"In that case I shall have to spend ten or twelve millions."

"You shall spend twenty if you require it," said Aramis, calmly.

"Where shall I get them?" exclaimed Fouquet.

"That is my affair, Monsieur the Superintendent; and do not be uneasy for a moment about it. The money will be placed at once at your disposal, sooner than you will have arranged the plans of your *fête*."

"Chevalier! Chevalier!" said Fouquet, giddy with amazement, "whither are you hurrying me?"

"Across the gulf into which you were about to fall," replied the Bishop of Vannes. "Take hold of my cloak and throw fear aside!"

"Why did you not tell me that sooner, Aramis? There was a day when with only one million you could have saved me."

"While to-day I can give you twenty," said the prelate. "Such is the case, however. The reason is very simple. On the day you speak of I had not at my disposal the million which you needed, while now I can easily procure the twenty millions we require."

"May Heaven hear you, and save me!"

Aramis smiled, with the singular expression habitual with him. "Heaven never fails to hear me," he said; "perhaps because I pray with a loud voice."

"I abandon myself to you unreservedly," Fouquet murmured.

"No, no; I do not understand it in that manner. It is I who am entirely at your service. Therefore you, who have the clearest, the most delicate, and the most ingenious mind, — you shall have entire control over the *fête*, even to the very smallest details. Only — "

"Only?" said Fouquet, as a man accustomed to appreciate the value of a parenthesis.

"Well, then, leaving the entire invention of the details to you, I shall reserve to myself a general superintendence over the execution."

"In what way?"

"I mean that you will make of me, on that day, a major-domo, a sort of inspector-general, or factotum, — something between a captain of the guard and manager or steward. I will look after the people, and will keep the keys of the doors. You will give your orders, of course; but will give them to no one but to me. They will pass through my lips, to reach those for whom they are intended, — you understand?"

"No, I do not understand."

"But you agree?"

"Of course, of course, my friend."

"That is all I care about, then. Thanks; and now go and prepare your list of invitations."

"Whom shall I invite?"

"Every one."

## CHAPTER X.

IN WHICH THE AUTHOR THINKS IT IS NOW TIME TO  
RETURN TO THE VICOMTE DE BRAGELONNE.

OUR readers have observed in this history the adventures of the new and of the past generation unrolled, as it were, side by side. To the former, the reflection of the glory of earlier years, the experience of the bitter things of this world ; to the former, also, the peace which takes possession of the heart, and the healing of the scars which were formerly deep and painful wounds. To the latter, the conflicts of love and vanity, bitter disappointments and ineffable delights, — life instead of memory. If any variety has been presented to the reader in the different episodes of this tale, it is to be attributed to the numerous shades of color which are presented on this double palette, where two pictures are seen side by side, mingling and harmonizing their severe and pleasing tones. The repose of the emotions of the one is found in the midst of the emotions of the other. After having talked reason with older heads, one likes to share in the wildness of young people. Therefore, if the threads of this story do not seem very intimately to connect the chapter we are now writing with that we have just written, we do not intend to give ourselves any more thought or trouble about it than Ruysdael took in painting an autumn sky after having finished a spring-time scene. We wish our readers to do as much, and to resume Raoul de Bragelonne's story at the very place where our last sketch left him.

In a state of frenzy and dismay, — or rather without reason, without will, without purpose, — Raoul fled heedlessly away after the scene in La Vallière's room. The king, Montalais, Louise, that chamber, that strange exclusion, Louise's grief, Montalais's terror, the king's wrath, — all seemed to indicate some misfortune. But what? He had arrived from London because he had been told of the existence of a danger, and at once this danger showed itself. Was not that sufficient for a lover? Certainly it was; but it was insufficient for a pure and upright heart such as his. And yet Raoul did not seek for explanations in the quarter where all jealous or less timid lovers would have sought them. He did not go straightway to his mistress, and say, "Louise, is it true that you love me no longer? Is it true that you love another?" Full of courage, full of friendship, as he was full of love; a religious observer of his word, and believing the words of others, — Raoul said within himself, "Guiche wrote to put me on my guard; Guiche knows something; I will go and ask Guiche what he knows, and tell him what I have seen."

The journey was not a long one. Guiche, who had been brought from Fontainebleau to Paris within the last two days, was beginning to recover from his wound, and to walk about a little in his room. He uttered a cry of joy as he saw Raoul enter his apartment with the eagerness of friendship. Raoul uttered a cry of grief on seeing De Guiche so pale, so thin, so melancholy. A few words, and a simple gesture which De Guiche made to put aside Raoul's arm, were sufficient to inform the latter of the truth.

"Ah! so it is," said Raoul, seating himself beside his friend; "one loves and dies."

"No, no, not dies," replied Guiche, smiling, "since I am now recovering, and since, too, I can press you in my arms."

“ Ah ! I understand.”

“ And I understand you too. You fancy I am unhappy, Raoul ? ”

“ Alas ! ”

“ No ; I am the happiest of men. My body suffers, but not my mind or my heart. If you only knew — Oh, I am, indeed, the very happiest of men ! ”

“ So much the better,” replied Raoul ; “ so much the better, provided it lasts.”

“ It is over. I have had enough happiness to last me to my dying day, Raoul.”

“ I have no doubt you have had ; but she — ”

“ Listen ! I love her, because — But you are not listening to me.”

“ I beg your pardon.”

“ Your mind is preoccupied.”

“ Well, yes ; your health, in the first place — ”

“ It is not that.”

“ My dear friend, you would be wrong, I think, to ask me any questions, — *you !* ” and he laid so much weight upon the “ you ” that he completely enlightened his friend upon the nature of the evil and the difficulty of remedying it.

“ You say that, Raoul, on account of what I wrote to you.”

“ Certainly. We will talk over that matter a little when you shall have finished telling me of all your own pleasures and pains.”

“ My dear friend, I am entirely at your service now.”

“ Thank you. I have hurried, I have flown here, — I came here from London in half the time the government couriers usually take. Now, tell me, my dear friend, what did you want ? ”

“ Nothing whatever, but to make you come.”

"Well, then, I am here."

"All is quite right, then."

"There is still something else, I imagine?"

"No, indeed."

"De Guiche!"

"Upon my honor!"

"You cannot possibly have crushed all my hopes so violently, or have exposed me to being disgraced by the king for my return, which is in disobedience of his orders, — you cannot, in short, have planted jealousy in my heart, merely to say to me, 'It is all right, sleep quietly!'"

"I do not say to you, Raoul, 'Sleep quietly!' But pray understand me; I never will, nor can I indeed, tell you anything else."

"Oh, my friend, for whom do you take me?"

"What do you mean?"

"If you know anything, why conceal it from me? If you do not know anything, why did you warn me?"

"True, true! I was very wrong, and I regret having done so, Raoul. It seems nothing to write to a friend and say, 'Come;' but to have this friend face to face, to feel him tremble and breathlessly wait to hear what one hardly dare tell him —"

"Dare! I have courage enough, if you have not," exclaimed Raoul, in despair.

"See how unjust you are, and how soon you forget you have to do with a poor wounded fellow, — the half of your heart! Calm yourself, Raoul! I said to you, 'Come;' you are here. Ask nothing further of the unhappy De Guiche."

"You summoned me in the hope that I should see with my own eyes, did you not? Nay, do not hesitate, for I have seen all."

"Oh!" exclaimed De Guiche.



“Or at least I thought —”

“There now, you see you are not sure. But if you have any doubt, my poor friend, what remains for me to do?”

“I have seen Louise agitated, Montalais in a state of bewilderment, the king —”

“The king?”

“Yes. You turn your head aside. The danger is there, the evil is there! tell me, is it not so, — it is the king?”

“I say nothing.”

“Oh, you say a thousand upon a thousand times more than nothing! Give me facts! for pity’s sake, give me proofs! My friend, the only friend I have, speak! My heart is crushed, wounded to death; I am dying from despair.”

“If that really be so, my dear Raoul,” replied De Guiche, “you relieve me from my difficulty, and I will tell you all, sure that I can tell you nothing but what is consoling, compared to the despair in which I now see you.”

“Go on, go on! I am listening.”

“Well, then, I can only tell you what you can learn from the first-comer.”

“From the first-comer? It is talked about?” cried Raoul.

“Before you say people talk about it, learn what it is that people can talk about. I assure you, solemnly, that people only talk about what may in truth be very innocent; perhaps a walk —”

“Ah! a walk with the king?”

“Yes, certainly, a walk with the king; and I believe the king has very frequently before taken walks with ladies, without on that account —”

"You would not have written to me, shall I say again, if there had been nothing unusual in this promenade?"

"I know that while the storm lasted, it would have been far better if the king had taken shelter somewhere else than to have remained with his head uncovered before La Vallière; but —"

"But?"

"The king is so courteous!"

"Oh, De Guiche, De Guiche, you are killing me!"

"Do not let us talk any more, then."

"Nay; let us continue. This walk was followed by others, I suppose?"

"No — I mean yes; there was the adventure of the oak, I think. But I know nothing about the matter at all." Raoul rose; De Guiche endeavored to imitate him, notwithstanding his weakness. "Well, I will not add another word; I have said either too much or not enough. Let others give you further information if they will, or if they can; my duty was to warn you, and that I have done. Watch over your own affairs now, yourself!"

"Question others? Alas! you are no true friend to speak to me in that manner," said the young man, in utter distress. "The first man I shall question may be either evilly disposed or a fool, — if the former, he will tell me a lie to torment me; if the latter, he will do still worse. Ah! De Guiche, De Guiche, before two hours are over, I shall have been told ten falsehoods, and shall have as many duels on my hands. Save me, then! Is it not best to know one's whole misfortune?"

"But I know nothing, I tell you. I was wounded, in a fever; my senses were gone, and I have only effaced impressions of it all. But there is no reason why we

should search very far, when the very man we want is close at hand. Is not D'Artagnan your friend?"

"Oh, true, true!"

"Go to him, then. He will throw light on the subject and without seeking to injure your eyes."

At this moment a lackey entered the room. "What is it?" said De Guiche.

"Some one is waiting for Monseigneur in the Cabinet des Porcelaines."

"Very well. Will you excuse me, my dear Raoul? I am so proud since I have been able to walk again."

"I would offer you my arm, De Guiche, if I did not guess that the person in question is a lady."

"I believe so," said De Guiche, smiling, as he quitted Raoul.

Raoul remained motionless, absorbed, overwhelmed, like the miner upon whom a vault has just fallen in: he is wounded, his life-blood is welling fast, his thoughts are confused; he endeavors to recover himself, and to save his life and his reason. A few minutes were all Raoul needed to dissipate the bewildering sensations which had been occasioned by these two revelations. He had already recovered the thread of his ideas, when suddenly through the door he fancied he recognized Montalais's voice in the Cabinet des Porcelaines. "She!" he cried. "Yes; it is indeed her voice! Oh! here is a woman who can tell me the truth; but shall I question her here? She conceals herself even from me; she is coming, no doubt, from Madame. I will see her in her own apartment. She will explain her alarm, her flight, the strange manner in which I was driven out; she will tell me all that, — after M. d'Artagnan, who knows everything, shall have given me fresh strength and courage. Madame — a coquette, I fear, and yet a coquette who is herself in love — has her

moments of kindness ; a coquette who is as capricious and uncertain as life or death, but who causes De Guiche to say that he is the happiest of men. He at least is lying on roses." And so he hastily quitted the count's apartments ; and reproaching himself as he went for having talked of nothing but his own affairs to De Guiche, he arrived at D'Artagnan's quarters.

## CHAPTER XI.

## BRAGELONNE CONTINUES HIS INQUIRIES.

THE captain was sitting buried in his leathern arm-chair, his spur fixed in the floor, his sword between his legs, and was occupied in reading a great number of letters, as he twisted his mustache. D'Artagnan uttered a welcome full of pleasure when he perceived his friend's son. "Raoul, my boy," he said, "by what lucky accident does it happen that the king has recalled you?"

These words did not sound over-agreeably in the young man's ears, who as he seated himself replied, "Upon my word, I cannot tell you; all that I know is that I have come back."

"Hum!" said D'Artagnan, folding up his letters and directing a look full of meaning at him. "What do you say, my boy? — that the king has not recalled you, and that you have returned? I do not at all understand that."

Raoul was already pale enough, and he began to turn his hat round and round in his hand with an air of constraint.

"What the deuce is the matter, that you look as you do, and what makes you so dumb?" said the captain. "Do people catch that fashion in England? I have been in England, and came back again as lively as a chaffinch. Will you not say something?"

"I have too much to say."

"Ah! ah! how is your father?"

"Forgive me, my dear friend ; I was going to ask you that."

D'Artagnan increased the sharpness of his penetrating gaze, which no secret was capable of resisting. "You are unhappy about something," he said.

"I am, indeed ; and you know very well what, M. d'Artagnan."

"I ?"

"Of course. Nay, do not pretend to be astonished."

"I am not pretending to be astonished, my friend."

"Dear captain, I know very well that in all trials of *finesse*, as well as in all trials of strength, I shall be beaten by you. You can see that at the present moment I am an idiot, a fool. I have neither head nor arm ; do not despise, but help me. In a few words, I am the most wretched of living beings."

"Oh ! oh ! why that ?" inquired D'Artagnan, unbuckling his belt and softening the ruggedness of his smile.

"Because Mademoiselle de la Vallière is deceiving me."

"She is deceiving you ?" said D'Artagnan, not a muscle of whose face had moved. "Those are big words. Who makes use of them ?"

"Every one."

"Ah ! if every one says so, there must be some truth in it. I begin to believe there is fire when I see the smoke. It is ridiculous, perhaps, but so it is."

"Therefore you do believe ?" exclaimed Bragelonne, quickly.

"I never mix myself up in affairs of that kind ; you know that very well."

"What ! not for a friend, for a son ?"

"Exactly. If you were a stranger, I should tell you — I should tell you nothing at all. How is Porthos, do you know ?"



"Monsieur," cried Raoul, pressing D'Artagnan's hand, "I entreat you, in the name of the friendship you have vowed to my father!"

"The deuce take it, you are really ill — from curiosity."

"No, it is not from curiosity; it is from love."

"Good! Another grand word! If you were really in love, my dear Raoul, you would be very different."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that if you were so deeply in love that I could believe I was addressing myself to your heart — But it is impossible."

"I tell you I love Louise to distraction."

D'Artagnan could read to the very bottom of the young man's heart.

"Impossible, I tell you," he said. "You are like all young men, — you are not in love, you are out of your senses."

"Well, suppose it were only that?"

"No sensible man ever succeeded in making much of a brain when the head was turned. I have lost my bearings in the same way a hundred times in my life. You would listen to me, but you would not hear me; you would hear, but you would not understand me; you would understand, but you would not obey me."

"Oh, try, try!"

"I say more. Even if I were unfortunate enough to know something, and foolish enough to communicate it to you — You are my friend, you say?"

"Indeed, yes."

"Very good. I should quarrel with you. You would never forgive me for having destroyed your illusion, as people say of love-affairs."

"M. d'Artagnan, you know all; and yet you plunge me in perplexity, in despair, in death."

"There, there!"

"I never complain, as you know; but as Heaven and my father would never forgive me for blowing out my brains, I will go and get the first person I meet to give me the information which you withhold; I will tell him he lies, and —"

"And you will kill him? A fine affair that would be! So much the better. What should I care for it? Kill my boy, kill, if it can give you any pleasure. It is exactly like a man with the toothache, who keeps on saying, 'Oh, what torture I am suffering! I could bite iron.' My answer always is, 'Bite, my friend, bite; the tooth will remain all the same.'"

"I shall not kill any one, Monsieur," said Raoul, gloomily.

"Yes, yes; you fellows of to-day put on those airs. Instead of killing, you will get killed yourself, I suppose you mean? Very fine indeed! How much I should regret you! I should say all day long: 'Ah! what a high-flown simpleton that Bragelonne was, — doubly an ingrate! I have passed my whole life almost in teaching him how to hold his sword properly, and the silly fellow has got himself spitted like a lark.' Go, then, Raoul, go and get yourself disposed of, if you like. I don't know who taught you logic; but, God damn me, — as the English say, — whoever it was, Monsieur, has stolen your father's money."

Raoul buried his face in his hands, murmuring, "No, no; I have not a single friend in the world!"

"Oh, bah!" said D'Artagnan.

"I meet with nothing but raillery or indifference."

"Idle fancies, Monsieur! I do not laugh at you, although I am a Gascon. And as for being indifferent, if I were so I should have sent you to all the devils a quarter

of an hour ago ; for you would sadden a man who was wild with joy, and would kill one who was sad. How now, young man ! Do you wish me to disgust you with the girl to whom you are attached, and to teach you to execrate women, who are the honor and happiness of human life ? ”

“ Oh, tell me, Monsieur, and I will bless you ! ”

“ Do you think, my dear fellow, that I can have crammed into my brain all that business about the carpenter and the painter and the staircase and the portrait, and a hundred other tales to sleep over ? ”

“ A carpenter ! what do you mean ? ”

“ Upon my word, I don’t know. Some one told me there was a carpenter who made an opening through a floor.”

“ In La Vallière’s room ? ”

“ Oh, I don’t know where ! ”

“ In the king’s apartment, perhaps ? ”

“ Of course ! If it were in the king’s apartment, I should tell you, I suppose.”

“ In whose room, then ? ”

“ I have told you for the last hour that I know nothing of the whole affair.”

“ But the painter, then, — the portrait ? ”

“ It seems that the king wished to have the portrait of one of the ladies belonging to the court.”

“ La Vallière’s ? ”

“ Why, you seem to have only that name in your mouth ! Who spoke to you of La Vallière ? ”

“ If it be not her portrait, then, why do you suppose it would concern me ? ”

“ I do not suppose it will concern you. But you ask me all sorts of questions, and I answer you ; you wish to know the current scandal, and I tell you. Make the best you can of it ! ”

Raoul struck his forehead with his hand, in utter despair. "It will kill me!" he said.

"So you have said already."

"Yes, you're right;" and he made a step or two as if he were going to leave.

"Where are you going?"

"To find some one who will tell me the truth."

"Who is that?"

"A woman."

"Mademoiselle de la Vallière herself, I suppose you mean?" said D'Artagnan, with a smile. "Ah, a famous idea that! You wish to be consoled by some one, and you will be so at once. She will tell you nothing ill of herself, of course. So be off!"

"You are mistaken, Monsieur," replied Raoul; "the woman I mean will tell me all the evil she possibly can."

"Montalais, I'll wager."

"Yes, Montalais."

"Ah! her friend, — a woman who in that capacity will exaggerate all that is either bad or good in the matter. Do not talk to Montalais, my good Raoul."

"You have some reason for wishing me not to talk with Montalais?"

"Well, I admit it. And, in point of fact, why should I play with you as a cat does with a poor mouse? You distress me, — you do indeed. And if I wish you not to speak to Montalais just now, it is because you will be betraying your secret, and people will take advantage of it. Wait, if you can!"

"I cannot."

"So much the worse. Why, you see, Raoul, if I had an idea — but I have not got one."

"Promise that you will pity me, my friend, — that is all I need, — and leave me to get out of the affair by myself."

"Oh, yes, indeed, in order that you may get deeper into the mire! A capital idea, truly! Go and sit down at that table and take a pen in your hand."

"What for?"

"To write to ask Montalais to give you an interview."

"Ah!" said Raoul, snatching eagerly at the pen which the captain held out to him.

Suddenly the door opened; and one of the musketeers, approaching D'Artagnan, said, "Captain, Mademoiselle de Montalais is here, and wishes to speak to you."

"To me?" murmured D'Artagnan. "Ask her to come in. I shall soon see," he said to himself, "whether she wishes to speak to me or not."

The cunning captain was quite right in his suspicions; for as soon as Montalais entered, she exclaimed, "Oh, Monsieur! Monsieur!—I beg your pardon, M. d'Artagnan."

"Oh, I forgive you, Mademoiselle," said D'Artagnan; "I know that at my age those who look for me have great need of me."

"I was looking for M. de Bragelonne," replied Montalais.

"How very fortunate that is! He was looking for you too. Raoul, will you accompany Mademoiselle Montalais?"

"Oh, certainly!"

"Go along, then," he said, as he gently pushed Raoul out of the cabinet; and then taking hold of Montalais's hand, he said in a low voice, "Be kind towards him; spare him, and spare her too, if you can."

"Ah!" she said in the same tone of voice, "it is not I who will speak to him."

"Who, then?"

"It is Madame who has sent for him."

“Very good,” cried D’Artagnan; “it is Madame, is it? In an hour’s time, then, the poor fellow will be cured.”

“Or else dead,” said Montalais, in a voice full of compassion. “Adieu, M. d’Artagnan!” she said; and she ran to join Raoul, who was waiting for her at a little distance from the door, very much puzzled and uneasy at the dialogue, which promised no good to him.



## CHAPTER XII.

## TWO JEALOUSIES.

LOVERS are very tender towards everything which concerns the person with whom they are in love. Raoul no sooner found himself alone with Montalais than he kissed her hand with rapture. "There, there," said the young girl, sadly, "you are throwing your kisses away; I will guarantee that they will not bring you back any interest."

"How so? Why? Will you explain to me, my dear Aure?"

"Madame will explain everything to you. I am going to take you to her apartments."

"What!"

"Silence! and throw aside your wild and savage looks. The windows here have eyes; the walls have ears. Have the kindness not to look at me any longer; be good enough to speak to me aloud of the rain, of the fine weather, and of the charms of England."

"At all events—" interrupted Raoul.

"I tell you, I warn you, that somewhere, I know not where, Madame is sure to have eyes and ears open. I am not very desirous, you can easily believe, to be dismissed or thrown into the Bastille. Let us talk, I tell you; or rather, do not let us talk at all."

Raoul clinched his hands, and assumed the look and gait of a man of courage, but of a man of courage on his way to the torture. Montalais, glancing in every direction, walking along with an easy swinging gait, and hold-

ing up her head pertly in the air, preceded him to Madame's apartments, where he was at once introduced. "Well," he thought, "this day will pass away without my learning anything. De Guiche had too much consideration for my feelings. He has no doubt an understanding with Madame; and both of them, by a friendly plot, have agreed to postpone the solution of the problem. Why have I not here a good enemy, — that serpent De Wardes, for instance? That he would bite is very likely; but I should not hesitate any more. To hesitate, to doubt, — better by far to die!"

Raoul was in Madame's presence. Henrietta, more charming than ever, was half lying, half reclining in her arm-chair, her little feet upon an embroidered velvet cushion; she was playing with a little kitten with long silky fur, which was biting her fingers and hanging by the lace of her collar.

Madame was thinking; she was thinking profoundly. It required both Montalais's and Raoul's voice to disturb her from her reverie.

"Your Highness sent for me?" repeated Raoul.

Madame shook her head, as if she were just awakening, and then said: "Good-morning, M. de Bragelonne. Yes, I sent for you. So you have returned from England?"

"Yes, Madame, and I am at your royal Highness's commands."

"Thank you. Leave us, Montalais!" and the latter immediately left the room.

"You have a few minutes to give me, M. de Bragelonne, have you not?"

"All my life is at your royal Highness's disposal," Raoul returned, with respect, guessing that there was something serious under all these outward courtesies of Madame; nor was he displeased, indeed, to observe the

seriousness of her manner, feeling persuaded that there was some sort of affinity between Madame's sentiments and his own. In fact, every one at court of any perception at all well knew the capricious fancy and absurd despotism of the princess's singular character. Madame had been flattered beyond all bounds by the king's attentions; she had made herself talked about; she had inspired the queen with that mortal jealousy which is the gnawing worm at the root of every woman's happiness. Madame, in a word, in her attempts to cure a wounded pride, had found that her heart had become deeply and passionately attached.

We know what Madame had done to recall Raoul, who had been sent out of the way by Louis XIV. Raoul did not know of her letter to Charles II., although D'Artagnan had guessed its contents. Who will undertake to account for that seemingly inexplicable mixture of love and vanity, that passionate tenderness of feeling, that prodigious duplicity of conduct? No one can, indeed; not even the bad angel who kindles the love of coquetry in the heart of woman.

"M. de Bragelonne," said the princess, after a moment's pause, "have you returned satisfied?"

Bragelonne looked at Madame Henrietta, and seeing how pale she was, from what she was keeping back, from what she was burning to disclose, replied: "Satisfied? What is there for me to be satisfied or dissatisfied about, Madame?"

"But what are those things with which a man of your age and of your appearance is usually either satisfied or dissatisfied?"

"How eager she is!" thought Raoul, terrified. "What is it that she is going to breathe into my heart?" and then, frightened at what she might possibly be going to

tell him, and wishing to put off the moment so wished for but so dreadful, when he should learn all, he replied, "I left behind me, Madame, a dear friend in good health, and on my return I find him very ill."

"You refer to M. de Guiche," replied Madame Henrietta, with the most imperturbable self-possession; "I have heard he is a very dear friend of yours."

"He is, indeed, Madame."

"Well, it is quite true he has been wounded; but he is better now. Oh, M. de Guiche is not to be pitied!" she said hurriedly; and then, recovering herself, added, "But has he anything to complain of? Has he complained of anything? Is there any cause of grief or sorrow with which we are not acquainted?"

"I allude only to his wound, Madame."

"So much the better, then; for in other respects M. de Guiche seems to be very happy, — he is always in very high spirits. I am sure that you, M. de Bragelonne, would far prefer to be, like him, wounded only in the body, — for what, indeed, is such a wound, after all?"

Raoul started. "Alas!" he said to himself, "she is returning to it." He made no reply.

"What did you say?" she inquired.

"I did not say anything, Madame."

"You did not say anything. You disapprove of my observation, then. You are perfectly satisfied, I suppose?"

Raoul approached closer to her. "Madame," he said, "your royal Highness wishes to say something to me, and your instinctive kindness and generosity of disposition induce you to be careful and considerate as to your manner of conveying it. Will your royal Highness throw this kind forbearance aside? I am strong, and I am listening."

"Ah!" replied Henrietta, "what do you understand, then?"

"That which your royal Highness wishes me to understand," said Raoul, trembling, notwithstanding his command over himself, as he pronounced these words.

"In point of fact," murmured the princess, "it seems cruel; but since I have begun —"

"Yes, Madame, since your Highness has deigned to begin, will you deign to finish —"

Henrietta rose hurriedly, and walked a few paces up and down her room. "What did M. de Guiche tell you?" she said suddenly.

"Nothing, Madame."

"Nothing! Did he say nothing? Ah, how well I recognize him in that!"

"No doubt he wished to spare me."

"And that is what friends call friendship. But surely M. d'Artagnan, whom you have just left, must have told you."

"No more than De Guiche, Madame."

Henrietta made a gesture full of impatience, as she said, "At least, you know all that the court has known?"

"I know nothing at all, Madame."

"Not the scene in the storm?"

"Not the scene in the storm."

"Not the *tête-à-tête* in the forest?"

"Not the *tête-à-tête* in the forest."

"Nor the flight to Chaillot?"

Raoul, whose head drooped like the flower which has been cut down by the sickle, made an almost superhuman effort to smile as he replied with the greatest gentleness: "I have had the honor to tell your royal Highness that I am absolutely ignorant of everything, — that I am a poor unremembered outcast, who has this moment arrived from England. There have been so many stormy waves between myself and those whom I left behind me here, that



the rumor of none of the circumstances your Highness refers to has been able to reach me."

Henrietta was affected by his extreme pallor, his gentleness, and his great courage. The principal feeling in her heart at that moment was an eager desire to hear the nature of the remembrance which the poor-lover retained of her who had made him suffer so much. "M. de Bragelonne," she said, "that which your friends have refused to do, I will do for you, whom I like and esteem. I will be your friend. You hold your head high, as a man of honor should do; and I should regret that you should have to bow it down under ridicule, and in a few days, it may be, under contempt."

"Ah!" exclaimed Raoul, perfectly livid. "Has it already gone so far?"

"If you do not know," said the princess, "I see that you guess; you were affianced, I believe, to Mademoiselle de la Vallière?"

"Yes, Madame."

"By that right, then, you deserve to be warned about her, as some day or other I shall be obliged to dismiss her from my service —"

"Dismiss La Vallière!" cried Bragelonne.

"Of course! Do you suppose that I shall always be accessible to the tears and protestations of the king? No, no; my house shall no longer be made a convenience for such practices. But you tremble!"

"No, Madame, no," said Bragelonne, making an effort over himself. "I thought I should have died just now; that was all. Your royal Highness did me the honor to say that the king wept and implored you —"

"Yes; but in vain," returned the princess, who then related to Raoul the scene that took place at Chaillot, and the king's despair on his return. She told him of his in-



dulgence to herself, and the terrible word with which the outraged princess, the humiliated coquette, had dashed aside the royal anger.

Raoul bowed his head.

"What do you think of it all?" she said.

"The king loves her," he replied.

"But you seem to think she does not love him!"

"Alas, Madame, I still think of the time when she loved me."

Henrietta was for a moment struck with admiration at this sublime disbelief; and then, shrugging her shoulders, she said: "You do not believe me, I see. Oh, how deeply you love her! And you doubt if she loves the king?"

"Until I have proof. Pardon! I have her word, you see; and she is a noble child."

"You require a proof? Be it so! Come with me."

## CHAPTER XIII.

## A DOMICILIARY VISIT.

THE princess, preceding Raoul, led him through the courtyard towards that part of the building which La Vallière inhabited ; and ascending the same staircase which Raoul had himself ascended that very morning, she paused at the door of the room in which the young man had been so strangely received by Montalais. The opportunity had been well chosen to carry out the project which Madame Henrietta had conceived, for the château was empty. The king, the courtiers, and the ladies of the court had set off for St. Germain ; Madame Henrietta alone, aware of Bragelonne's return, and thinking over the advantages which might be drawn from this return, had feigned indisposition in order to remain behind. Madame was therefore confident of finding La Vallière's room and Saint-Aignan's apartment unoccupied. She took a pass-key from her pocket, and opened the door of her maid-of-honor's room. Bragelonne's gaze was immediately fixed upon the interior of the room, which he recognized at once ; and the impression which the sight of it produced upon him was one of the first tortures that had awaited him. The princess looked at him, and her practised eye could at once detect what was passing in the young man's heart.

"You asked me for proofs," she said ; "do not be astonished, then, if I give you them. But if you do not think you have courage enough to confront them, there is still time to withdraw."

"I thank you, Madame," said Bragelonne; "but I came here to be convinced. You promised to convince me; do so."

"Enter, then," said Madame, "and shut the door behind you."

Bragelonne obeyed, and then turned towards the princess, whom he interrogated by a look.

"You know where you are, I suppose?" inquired Madame Henrietta.

"Everything leads me to believe that I am in Made-moiselle de la Vallière's room."

"You are."

"But I would observe to your Highness that this room is a room, and is not a proof."

"Wait," said the princess, as she walked to the foot of the bed, folded up the screen into its several compartments, and stooped down towards the floor. "Look here," she continued; "stoop down, and lift up this trap-door."

"A trap-door!" said Raoul, astonished; for D'Artagnan's words recurred to his mind, and he remembered that D'Artagnan had made vague use of that word. He looked in vain for some cleft or crevice which might indicate an opening, or a ring to assist in lifting up some portion of the planking.

"Ah! that is true," said Madame Henrietta, smiling; "I forgot the secret spring, — the fourth plank of the flooring. Press on the spot where you will observe a knot in the wood. Those are the instructions. Press, Viscount! press, I say, yourself!"

Raoul, pale as death, pressed his finger on the spot which had been indicated to him; at the same moment the spring began to work, and the trap rose of its own accord.

"It is very ingenious, certainly," said the princess; "and one can see that the architect foresaw that it would be a small hand which would have to employ that device. See how easily the trap-door opens without assistance!"

"A staircase!" cried Raoul.

"Yes; and a very pretty one too," said Madame Henrietta. "See, Viscount, the staircase has a balustrade, intended to prevent the falling of timid persons, who might be tempted to descend; and I will risk myself on it accordingly. Come, Viscount, follow me!"

"But before following you, Madame, may I ask whither this staircase leads?"

"Ah! true; I forgot to tell you. You know, perhaps, that formerly M. de Saint-Aignan lived in the very next apartment to the king's?"

"Yes, Madame, I am aware of that, — that was the arrangement, at least, before I left; and more than once I have had the honor of visiting him in his old rooms."

"Well, he obtained the king's leave to change that convenient and beautiful apartment for the two rooms to which this staircase will conduct us, and which together form a lodging for him twice as small and at ten times greater distance from the king, — a close proximity to whom is by no means disdained, in general, by the gentlemen belonging to the court."

"Very good, Madame," returned Raoul; "but go on, I beg, for I do not yet understand."

"Well, then, it accidentally happened," continued the princess, "that M. de Saint-Aignan's apartment is situated underneath the apartments of my maids of honor, and particularly underneath the room of La Vallière."

"But what was the motive of this trap-door and this staircase?"

"That I cannot tell you. Would you like to go down

to M. de Saint-Aignan's rooms? Perhaps we shall there find the solution of the enigma."

Madame set the example by going down herself; and Raoul, sighing deeply, followed her. At every step Bragelonne took, he advanced farther into that mysterious apartment which had been witness to La Vallière's sighs, and still retained the sweetest perfume of her presence. Bragelonne fancied that he perceived, as he inhaled his every breath, that the young girl must have passed through there. Then succeeded to these emanations of herself, which he regarded as invisible though certain proofs, the flowers she preferred to all others, the books of her own selection. Had Raoul preserved a single doubt on the subject, it would have vanished at the secret harmony of tastes and disposition of the mind shown in the things of common use. La Vallière, in Bragelonne's eyes, was present there in every article of furniture, in the color of the hangings, in everything that surrounded him. Dumb, and completely overwhelmed, there was nothing further for him now to learn, and he followed his pitiless conductress as blindly as the culprit follows the executioner. Madame, as cruel as all women of delicate and nervous temperaments are, did not spare him the slightest detail. But it must be admitted that notwithstanding the kind of apathy into which he had fallen, none of these details, even had he been left alone, would have escaped him. The happiness of the woman who loves, when that happiness is derived from a rival, is a torture for a jealous man; but for a jealous man such as Raoul was, for that heart which for the first time was steeped in gall and bitterness, Louise's happiness was in reality an ignominious death, a death of body and soul. He divined all, — their hands clasped in each other's, their faces drawn close together, and reflected, side by side, in loving prox-



imity, as they gazed upon the mirrors around them, — so sweet an occupation for lovers, who, as they thus see themselves twice over, impress the picture more enduringly in their memories. He divined the kiss unseen behind the heavy curtains falling free of their bands. He translated into feverish pains the eloquence of the couches hid in their shadow. That luxury, that studied elegance, full of intoxication; that extreme care to spare the loved object every annoyance or to occasion her a delightful surprise; that strength and power of love multiplied by the strength and power of royalty itself, — struck Raoul a mortal blow. Oh, if there be anything which can assuage the tortures of jealousy, it is the inferiority of the man who is preferred to yourself; while, on the very contrary, if there be a hell within hell, a torture without name in language, it is the almightiness of a god placed at the disposal of a rival, together with youth, beauty, and grace. In moments such as these, God himself seems to have taken part against the rejected lover.

One final pang was reserved for poor Raoul. Madame Henrietta lifted a silk curtain, and behind the curtain he perceived La Vallière's portrait. Not only the portrait of La Vallière, but of La Vallière eloquent of youth, beauty, and happiness, inhaling life and enjoyment at every pore, because at eighteen years of age love itself is life.

"Louise!" murmured Bragelonne, "Louise! is it true, then? Oh, you have never loved me, for never have you looked at me in that manner!" and he felt as if his heart were crushed within his bosom.

Madame Henrietta looked at him, almost envious of his extreme grief, although she well knew there was nothing to envy in it, and that she herself was as passionately loved by De Guiche as Louise by Bragelonne. Raoul interpreted Madame Henrietta's look.



“Oh, forgive me, forgive me, Madame! In your presence I know I ought to have greater mastery over myself. But may the Lord God of heaven and of earth grant that you may never be struck by the blow which crushes me at this moment; for you are but a woman, and would not be able to endure so terrible an affliction. Forgive me! I am but a poor gentleman, while you belong to the race of the happy, of the all-powerful, of the elect —”

“M. de Bragelonne,” replied Henrietta, “a heart such as yours merits all the consideration and respect which a queen’s heart even can bestow. I am your friend, Monsieur; and as such, indeed, I would not allow your whole life to be poisoned by perfidy and covered with ridicule. It was I, indeed, who with more courage than any of your pretended friends, — I except M. de Guiche, — was the cause of your return from London; it is I, also, who have given you these melancholy proofs, — necessary however for your cure, if you are a lover with courage in his heart, and not a weeping Amadis. Do not thank me; pity me even, and do not serve the king less faithfully than you have done.”

Raoul smiled bitterly. “Ah! true, true; I was forgetting that! The king is my master.”

“Your liberty, nay, your very life, is at stake.”

A steady, penetrating look informed Madame Henrietta that she was mistaken, and that her last argument was not likely to affect the young man. “Take care, M. de Bragelonne,” she said; “for if you do not weigh well all your actions, you might throw into an extravagance of wrath a prince whose passions, once aroused, exceed the limits of reason, and you would thereby involve your friends and family in distress. You must bend; you must submit, and must cure yourself.”

“I thank you, Madame. I appreciate the advice your

royal Highness is good enough to give me, and I will endeavor to follow it ; but one final word, I beg."

"Name it."

"Should I be indiscreet in asking you the secret of this staircase, of this trap-door, — a secret which you have discovered ?"

"Oh, nothing is more simple ! For the purpose of exercising a surveillance over the young girls who are attached to my service, I have duplicate keys of their doors. It seemed very strange to me that M. de Saint-Aignan should change his apartments ; it seemed very strange that the king should come to see M. de Saint-Aignan every day ; and finally, it seemed very strange that so many things should be done during your absence, — that the very habits and customs of the court seemed to be changed. I do not wish to be trifled with by the king, nor to serve as a cloak for his love-affairs ; for after La Vallière, who weeps, he will take a fancy to Montalais, who laughs, and then to Tonnay-Charente, who sings. To act such a part as that would be unworthy of me. I have thrust aside the scruples which my friendship for you suggested. I have discovered the secret. I have wounded your feelings, I know, and I again entreat you to excuse me ; but I had a duty to fulfil. I have discharged it. You are now forewarned. The tempest will soon burst ; protect yourself."

"You naturally expect, however, that a result of some kind must follow," replied Bragelonne, with firmness ; "for you do not suppose I shall silently accept the shame which is thrust upon me, or the treachery which has been practised against me ?"

"You will take whatever steps in the matter you please, M. Raoul ; only, do not betray the source whence you derived the truth. That is all I have to ask ; that is

the only price I require for the service I have rendered you."

"Fear nothing, Madame!" said Bragelonne, with a bitter smile.

"I bribed the locksmith in whom the lovers had confided. You can just as well do so as myself, can you not?"

"Yes, Madame. Your royal Highness, however, has no other advice or caution to give me, except that of not betraying you?"

"None other."

"I am, therefore, about to beg your royal Highness to allow me to remain here for one moment."

"Without me?"

"Oh, no, Madame! It matters very little, for what I have to do can be done in your presence. I only ask one moment to write a line to some one."

"It is dangerous, M. de Bragelonne. Take care!"

"No one can possibly know that your royal Highness has done me the honor to conduct me here. Besides, I shall sign the letter I am going to write."

"Do as you please, then."

Raoul drew out his tablet, and wrote rapidly on one of the leaves the following words:—

MONSIEUR THE COUNT, — Do not be surprised to find here this paper signed by me. The friend whom I shall very shortly send to call on you will have the honor to explain the object of my visit to you.

VICOMTE RAOUL DE BRAGELONNE.

Rolling up the paper, and slipping it into the lock of the door which communicated with the room set apart for the two lovers, Raoul satisfied himself that the paper was so apparent that De Saint-Aignan could not but see it as he

entered ; then he rejoined the princess, who had already reached the top of the staircase. They then separated, — Raoul pretending to thank her Highness ; Henrietta pitying, or seeming to pity, with all her heart the unhappy man she had just condemned to so fearful torture. “ Oh,” she said, as she saw him disappear, pale as death, his eyes injected with blood, “ if I had known this, I should have concealed the truth from that poor young man ! ”

## CHAPTER XIV.

## PORTHOS'S PLAN OF ACTION.

THE multiplicity of the personages we have introduced into this long history compels that each shall appear only in his own turn and according to the exigences of the recital. The result is that our readers have had no opportunity of again meeting our friend Porthos since his return from Fontainebleau. The honors which he had received from the king had not changed the tranquil, affectionate character of that worthy man; only, he held up his head a little higher than usual, and a majesty of demeanor as it were betrayed itself, since the honor of dining at the king's table had been accorded him.

His Majesty's banqueting-room had produced a certain effect upon Porthos. Le Seigneur de Bracieux et de Pierrefonds delighted to remember that during that memorable dinner the numerous array of servants and the large number of officials who were in attendance upon the guests gave a certain tone and effect to the repast, and seemed to furnish the room. Porthos proposed to confer upon Mouston a position of some kind or other, in order to establish a sort of hierarchy among his domestics, and to create a military household, — which was not unusual among the great captains of the age, since in the preceding century this luxury had been greatly encouraged by Messieurs de Tréville, de Schomberg, de la Vieuville, without alluding to Messieurs de Richelieu, de Condé, and de Bouillon-Turenne. And, therefore, why should not he, — Porthos, the

friend of the king and of M. Fouquet, a baron, an engineer, etc., — why should not he indeed enjoy all the delightful privileges attached to large possessions and great merit? Somewhat neglected by Aramis, who we know was greatly occupied with M. Fouquet; neglected also, on account of his being on duty, by D'Artagnan; tired of Trüchen and Planchet, — Porthos was surprised to find himself dreaming, without precisely knowing why; but if any one had said to him, "Do you want anything, Porthos?" he would most certainly have replied, "Yes."

After one of those dinners, during which Porthos attempted to recall to his mind all the details of the royal banquet, — half joyful, thanks to the excellence of the wines; half melancholy, thanks to his ambitious ideas, — Porthos was gradually falling off into a gentle doze, when his servant entered to announce that M. de Bragelonne wished to speak to him. Porthos passed into an adjoining room, where he found his young friend in the disposition of mind of which we are already aware. Raoul advanced towards Porthos, and shook him by the hand. Porthos, surprised at his seriousness of aspect, offered him a seat.

"Dear M. du Vallon," said Raoul, "I have a service to ask of you."

"Nothing could happen more fortunately, my young friend," replied Porthos. "I have had eight thousand livres sent me this morning from Pierrefonds; and if you want any money —"

"No, I thank you; it is not money."

"So much the worse, then. I have always heard it said that that is the rarest service, but the easiest to render. The remark struck me; I like to cite remarks that strike me."

"Your heart is as good as your mind is sound and true."



"You are too kind, I'm sure. Will you have your dinner immediately?"

"No; I am not hungry."

"Eh! What a dreadful country England is!"

"Not too much so; but —"

"Well, if such excellent fish and meat were not to be procured there, it would hardly be endurable."

"Yes. I have come —"

"I am listening. Only allow me to take something to drink. One gets thirsty in Paris;" and Porthos ordered a bottle of champagne to be brought. Then, having first filled Raoul's glass, he filled his own, took a large draught, and resumed: "I needed that, in order to listen to you with proper attention. I am now quite at your service. What have you to ask me, dear Raoul? What do you want?"

"Give me your opinion upon quarrels in general, my dear friend."

"My opinion? Well — but — Explain your idea a little," replied Porthos, rubbing his forehead.

"I mean, — are you generally of accommodating disposition whenever any misunderstanding arises between a friend of yours and a stranger, for instance?"

"Oh! of excellent disposition, as always."

"Very good; but what do you do in such a case?"

"Whenever any friend of mine has a quarrel, I always act upon one principle."

"What is that?"

"That all lost time is irreparable, and that one never arranges an affair so well as when the dispute is still warm."

"Ah! indeed, that is your principle?"

"Thoroughly; so, as soon as a quarrel takes place, I bring the two parties together."

“Exactly.”

“You understand that by this means it is impossible for an affair not to be arranged.”

“I should have thought,” said Raoul, with astonishment, “that, treated in this manner, an affair would, on the contrary —”

“Oh, not the least in the world! Just fancy now! I have had in my life something like a hundred and eighty to a hundred and ninety regular duels, without reckoning hasty encounters or chance meetings.”

“It is a very handsome number,” said Raoul, unable to resist a smile.

“A mere nothing; but I am so gentle. D’Artagnan reckons his duels by hundreds. It is very true he is a little too hard and sharp, — I have often told him so.”

“And so,” resumed Raoul, “you generally arrange the affairs of honor your friends confide to you.”

“There is not a single instance in which I have not finished by arranging every one of them,” said Porthos, with a gentleness and confidence which surprised Raoul.

“But the way in which you settle them is at least honorable, I suppose?”

“Oh, rely upon that! And at this stage I will explain my other principle to you. As soon as my friend has confided his quarrel to me, this is what I do: I go to his adversary at once, armed with a politeness and self-possession which are absolutely requisite under such circumstances”

“That is the way, then,” said Raoul, bitterly, “that you arrange the affairs so safely.”

“I believe you. I go to the adversary, then, and say to him, ‘It is impossible, Monsieur, that you are ignorant of the extent to which you have insulted my friend.’”

Raoul frowned at this remark.

"It sometimes happens, — very often indeed," pursued Porthos, — "that my friend has not been insulted at all; he has even been the first to give offence. You can imagine, therefore, whether my language is not well chosen;" and Porthos burst into a peal of laughter.

"Decidedly," said Raoul to himself, while the formidable thunder of Porthos's laughter was ringing in his ears, "I am very unfortunate. De Guiche treats me with coldness, D'Artagnan with ridicule, Porthos is too tame; no one is ready to 'arrange' this affair in my way. And I came to Porthos because I wished to find a sword instead of cold reasoning. Ah, what wretched luck!"

Porthos, who had recovered himself, continued: "By a simple expression, I leave my adversary without an excuse."

"That is as it may happen," said Raoul, indifferently.

"Not at all; it is quite certain. I have not left him an excuse; and then it is that I display all my courtesy, in order to attain the happy issue of my project. I advance, therefore, with an air of great politeness, and taking my adversary by the hand —"

"Oh!" said Raoul, impatiently.

"'Monsieur,' I say to him, 'now that you are convinced of having given the offence, we are sure of reparation; between my friend and yourself the future can offer only an exchange of gracious ceremonies. Consequently I am instructed to give you the length of my friend's sword —'"

"What!" said Raoul.

"Wait a minute! — 'the length of my friend's sword. My horse is waiting below; my friend is in such and such a spot, and is impatiently awaiting your agreeable society. I will take you with me; we can call upon your second as we go along. The affair is arranged.'"

"And so," said Raoul, pale with vexation, "you reconcile the two adversaries on the ground."

"I beg your pardon," interrupted Porthos. "Reconcile? What for?"

"You said that the affair was arranged."

"Of course! since my friend is waiting for him."

"Well, what then? If he is waiting —"

"Well, if he is waiting, it is merely to stretch his legs a little; the adversary, on the contrary, is stiff from riding. They place themselves in proper order, and my friend kills his opponent; the affair is ended."

"Ah! he kills him?" cried Raoul.

"I should think so," said Porthos. "Is it likely I should ever have as a friend a man who allows himself to get killed? I have a hundred and one friends; at the head of the list stand your father, Aramis, and D'Artagnan, — all of whom are living and well, I believe."

"Oh, my dear baron!" exclaimed Raoul, delightedly, as he embraced Porthos.

"You approve of my method, then?" said the giant.

"I approve of it so thoroughly that I shall have recourse to it this very day, without a moment's delay, — at once, in fact. You are the very man I have been looking for"

"Good! Here I am, then. You want to fight?"

"Absolutely so."

"It is very natural. With whom?"

"With M. de Saint-Aignan."

"I know him, — a most agreeable man, who was exceedingly polite to me the day I had the honor of dining with the king. I shall certainly return his politeness, even if that were not my usual custom. So, he has given you offence?"

"A mortal offence."

"The devil ! I can say ' mortal offence ' ? "

" More than that, even, if you like."

" That is very convenient."

" I may look upon it as all arranged, may I not ? " said Raoul, smiling.

" As a matter of course. Where will you be waiting for him ? "

" Ah ! I forgot. It is a very delicate matter. M. de Saint-Aignan is a great friend of the king."

" So I have heard it said."

" So that if I kill him — "

" Oh, you will kill him certainly ; you must take every precaution to do so ! But there is no difficulty in these matters now ; if you had lived in our early days, — oh, that was something like ! "

" My dear friend, you have not quite understood me. I mean that M. de Saint-Aignan being a friend of the king, the affair will be more difficult to manage, since the king might learn beforehand — "

" Oh, no ; that is not likely. You know my method : ' Monsieur, you have injured my friend, and — ' "

" Yes, I know it."

" And then : ' Monsieur, I have horses below.' I carry him off before he can have spoken to any one."

" Will he allow himself, think you, to be carried off like that ? "

" I should think so ! I should like to see it fail ! It would be the first time, if it did. It is true, though, that the young men of the present day — Bah ! I would carry him off bodily, if it were necessary ; " and Porthos, adding gesture to speech, lifted Raoul and his chair.

" Very good," said Raoul, laughing. " All we have to do is to state the grounds of the quarrel to M. de Saint-Aignan."

"Well ; but that is done, it seems."

"No, my dear M. du Vallon, the usage of the present day requires that the cause of the quarrel should be explained."

"By your new method, yes. Well, then, tell me what it is —"

"The fact is —"

"Deuce take it ! See how troublesome this is ! In former days we never had any occasion to talk. People fought then for the sake of fighting ; and I, for one, know no better reason than that."

"You are quite right, my friend."

"However, tell me what the cause is."

"It is too long a story to tell ; only, as one must particularize to some extent —"

"Yes, yes, the devil ! — with the new method."

"As it is necessary, I said, to be specific, and as on the other hand the affair is full of difficulties and requires the most absolute secrecy —"

"Oh ! oh !"

"You will have the kindness merely to tell M. de Saint-Aignan that he has insulted me, — in the first place, by changing his lodgings."

"By changing his lodgings ? Good !" said Porthos, who began to count on his fingers ; "next ?"

"Then, in getting a trap-door made in his new apartments."

"I understand," said Porthos ; "a trap-door ! Upon my word, this is very serious ; you ought to be furious at that. What the deuce does the fellow mean by getting trap-doors made without first consulting you ? Trap-doors ! *Mordieux !* I haven't any, except in my dungeons at Bracieux."

"And you will add," said Raoul, "that my last motive



for considering myself insulted is the portrait that M. de Saint-Aignan well knows."

"Is it possible? A portrait too! A change of residence, a trap-door, and a portrait! Why, my dear friend, with but one of those causes of complaint there is enough, and more than enough, for all the gentlemen in France and Spain to cut one another's throats; and that is saying but very little."

"Well, my dear friend, you are furnished with all you need, I suppose?"

"I shall take a second horse with me. Select your own rendezvous; and while you are waiting there you can practise some of the best passes, so as to get your limbs as elastic as possible."

"Thank you. I shall be waiting for you in the wood of Vincennes, close to Minimes."

"All's right, then. Where am I to find this M. de Saint-Aignan?"

"At the Palais-Royal."

Porthos rang a huge hand-bell. "My court suit," he said to the servant who answered the summons, "my horse, and a led horse to accompany me." Then turning to Raoul as soon as the servant had quitted the room, he said, "Does your father know anything about this?"

"No; I am going to write to him."

"And D'Artagnan?"

"No, nor D'Artagnan, either. He is very cautious, you know, and might have diverted me from my purpose."

"D'Artagnan is a sound adviser, though," said Porthos, astonished that in his own loyal faith in D'Artagnan any one could have thought of himself so long as there was a D'Artagnan in the world.

"Dear M. du Vallon," replied Raoul, "do not question me any more, I implore you. I have told you all that I

had to say; it is prompt action that I now expect, as sharp and decided as you know how to arrange it. That, indeed, is my reason for having chosen you."

"You will be satisfied with me," replied Porthos.

"Do not forget, either, that except ourselves no one must know anything of this meeting."

"People always find these things out," said Porthos, "when a dead body is discovered in a wood. But I promise you everything, my dear friend, except concealing the dead body. There it is; and it must be seen, as a matter of course. It is a principle of mine not to bury bodies. That has a smack of the assassin about it. Every risk must take its risk, as they say in Normandy."

"To work, then, my dear friend!"

"Rely upon me," said the giant, finishing the bottle, while the servant spread out upon a sofa the gorgeously decorated dress trimmed with lace. Raoul left the room, saying to himself with a secret delight: "Perfidious king! traitorous monarch! I cannot reach thee. I do not wish it; for the person of a king is sacred. But your accomplice, your panderer, — the coward who represents you, — shall pay for your crime. I will kill him in thy name, and afterwards we will think of Louise."

## CHAPTER XV.

THE CHANGE OF RESIDENCE, THE TRAP-DOOR, AND  
THE PORTRAIT.

PORTHOS, to his great delight intrusted with this mission, which made him feel young again, took half an hour less than his usual time to put on his court suit. To show that he was a man acquainted with the usages of the highest society, he had begun by sending his lackey to inquire if M. de Saint-Aignan were at home, and received, in answer, that M. le Comte de Saint-Aignan had had the honor of accompanying the king to St. Germain, as well as the whole court, but that Monsieur the Count had just at that moment returned. Immediately upon this reply, Porthos made haste, and reached De Saint-Aignan's apartments just as the latter was having his boots taken off.

The expedition had been delightful. The king, who was in love more than ever and of course happier than ever, had behaved in the most charming manner to every one. Nothing could possibly equal his kindness. M. de Saint-Aignan, it may be remembered, was a poet, and fancied that he had proved that he was so under too many memorable circumstances to allow the title to be disputed by any one. An indefatigable rhymester, he had during the whole of the journey overwhelmed with quatrains, sextains, and madrigals, first the king, and then La Vallière. The king was, on his side, in a similarly poetical mood, and had made a distich ; while La Vallière, like all women who are in love, had composed two sonnets. As one may see, then, the day had not been a bad one for

Apollo ; and therefore, as soon as he had returned to Paris, De Saint-Aignan, who knew beforehand that his verses would be extensively circulated in court circles, occupied himself, with a little more attention than he had been able to bestow during the excursion, with the composition as well as with the idea itself. Consequently, with all the tenderness of a father about to start his children in life, he candidly asked himself whether the public would find these fruits of his imagination sufficiently elegant and graceful ; and in order to make his mind easy on the subject, M. de Saint-Aignan recited to himself the madrigal he had composed, and which he had repeated from memory to the king, and which he had promised to write out for him on his return, —

“ ‘ Iris, vos yeux malins ne disent pas toujours  
Ce que votre pensée à votre cœur confie ;  
Iris, pourquoi faut-il que je passe ma vie  
À plus aimer vos yeux qui m’ont joué ces tours ? ’ ”

This madrigal, graceful as it was, failed to satisfy De Saint-Aignan when it had passed from oral delivery to the written form of poetry. Many had thought it charming, — its author first of all ; but on second view it was not so pleasing. So De Saint-Aignan, sitting at his table, with one leg crossed over the other, and rubbing his brow, repeated, —

“ ‘ Iris, vos yeux malins ne disent pas toujours —

Oh ! as to that, now,” he murmured, “ that is irreproachable. I might even add that it is somewhat in the manner of Ronsard or Malherbe, which makes me proud. Unhappily, it is not so with the second line. There is good reason for the saying that the easiest line to make is the first.” And he continued : —

“ ‘ Ce que votre pensée à votre cœur confie — ’

Ah, there is the 'thought' confiding in the 'heart'! Why should not the heart confide with as good reason in the thought? In faith, for my part, I see nothing to hinder. Where the devil have I been, to bring together these two hemistiches? Now, the third is good, —

'Iris, pourquoi faut-il que je passe ma vie —'

although the rhyme is not strong, — *vie* and *confie*. My faith! the Abbé Boyer, who is a great poet, has, like me, made a rhyme of *vie* and *confie* in the tragedy of 'Oropaste, or the False Tonaxare;' without reckoning that M. Corneille did not scruple to do so in his tragedy of 'Sophonisbe.' Good, then, for *vie* and *confie*! Yes; but the line is impertinent. I remember now that the king bit his nail at that moment. In fact, it gives him the appearance of saying to Mademoiselle de la Vallière, 'How does it happen that I am captivated by you?' It would have been better, I think, to say, —

'Que bénis soient les dieux qui condamnent ma vie —'

*Condamnent!* ah! well, yes, there is a compliment! — the king condemned to La Vallière — no!" Then he repeated: —

" 'Mais bénis soient les dieux qui — destinent ma vie.'

Not bad, although *destinent ma vie* is weak; but, good heavens! everything can't be strong in a quatrain. *À plus aimer vos yeux*, — in loving more whom, what? Obscurity. But obscurity is nothing; since La Vallière and the king have understood me, every one will understand me. Yes; but here is something melancholy, — the last hemistich: *qui m'ont joué ces tours*. The plural necessitated by the rhyme! And then to call the modesty of La Vallière a trick, — that is not happy! I shall be a byword to all my quill-driving acquaintances. They will say that my poems

are verses in the grand-seigneur style ; and if the king hears it said that I am a bad poet, he will take it into his head to believe it."

While confiding these words to his heart and engaging his heart in these thoughts, the count was undressing himself. He had just taken off his coat, and was putting on his dressing-gown, when he was informed that M. le Baron du Vallon de Bracieux de Pierrefonds was waiting to be received.

"Eh!" he said, "what does that bunch of names mean? I don't know him."

"It is the same gentleman," replied the lackey, "who had the honor of dining with you, Monseigneur, at the king's table, when his Majesty was staying at Fontainebleau."

"With the king, at Fontainebleau?" cried De Saint-Aignan. "Eh! quick, quick! introduce that gentleman."

The lackey hastened to obey. Porthos entered. M. de Saint-Aignan had an excellent recollection of persons, and at the first glance he recognized the gentleman from the country who enjoyed so singular a reputation, and whom the king had received so favorably at Fontainebleau, in spite of the smiles of some of those who were present. He therefore advanced towards Porthos with all outward signs of good-will, which Porthos thought but natural, considering that he himself, whenever he called upon an adversary, hoisted the standard of the most refined politeness. De Saint-Aignan desired the servant to give Porthos a chair ; and the latter, who saw nothing unusual in this act of politeness, sat down gravely, and coughed.

The ordinary courtesies having been exchanged between the two gentlemen, the count, since to him the visit was paid, said, "May I ask, Monsieur the Baron, to what happy circumstance I owe the favor of your visit?"



"The very thing I am about to have the honor of explaining to you, Monsieur the Count; but, I beg your pardon —"

"What is the matter, Monsieur?" inquired De Saint-Aignan.

"I regret to say that I have broken your chair."

"Not at all, Monsieur," said De Saint-Aignan; "not at all."

"It is the fact, though, Monsieur the Count; I have broken it, — so much so, indeed, that if I remain in it I shall fall down, which would be an exceedingly disagreeable position for me in the discharge of the very serious mission which has been intrusted to me with regard to yourself."

Porthos rose; and but just in time, for the chair had given way several inches. De Saint-Aignan looked about him for something more solid for his guest to sit upon.

"Modern articles of furniture," said Porthos, while the count was looking about, "are constructed in a ridiculously light manner. In my early days, when I used to sit down with far more energy than now, I do not remember ever to have broken a chair, except in taverns, with my arms." De Saint-Aignan smiled at this remark. "But," said Porthos, as he settled himself on a couch, which creaked but did not give way beneath his weight, "that unfortunately has nothing whatever to do with my present visit."

"Why unfortunately? Are you the bearer of a message of ill omen, Monsieur the Baron?"

"Of ill omen, — for a gentleman? Certainly not, Monsieur the Count," replied Porthos, nobly. "I have simply come to say that you have seriously offended a friend of mine."

"I, Monsieur?" exclaimed De Saint-Aignan, — "I have

offended a friend of yours, do you say? May I ask his name?"

"M. Raoul de Bragelonne."

"I have offended M. Raoul de Bragelonne!" cried De Saint-Aignan. "I really assure you, Monsieur, that it is quite impossible; for M. de Bragelonne, whom I know but very slightly, — nay, whom I know hardly at all, — is in England; and as I have not seen him for a long time past, I cannot possibly have offended him."

"M. de Bragelonne is in Paris, Monsieur the Count," said Porthos, perfectly unmoved; "and I repeat, it is quite certain you have offended him, since he himself told me you had. Yes, Monsieur, you have seriously offended him, mortally offended him, I repeat."

"It is impossible, Monsieur the Baron, I swear, — quite impossible."

"Besides," added Porthos, "you cannot be ignorant of the circumstance, since M. de Bragelonne informed me that he had already apprised you of it by a note."

"I give you my word of honor, Monsieur, that I have received no note whatever."

"This is most extraordinary," replied Porthos.

"I will convince you," said De Saint-Aignan, "that I have received nothing in any way from him;" and he rang the bell. "Basque," he said to the servant who entered, "how many letters or notes were sent here during my absence?"

"Three, Monsieur the Count, — a note from M. de Fiesque, one from Madame de Laferté, and a letter from M. de las Fuentes."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, Monsieur the Count."

"Speak the truth before this gentleman, — the truth, you understand! I will take care you are not blamed."

"There was a note, also, from — from —"

"Well, from whom?"

"From Mademoiselle de la Val —"

"That is quite sufficient," interrupted Porthos. "I believe you, Monsieur the Count."

De Saint-Aignan dismissed the valet, and followed him to the door in order to close it after him; and when he had done so, looking straight before him, he happened to see in the keyhole of the adjoining apartment the paper which Bragelonne had slipped in there as he left. "What is this?" he said.

Porthos, who was sitting with his back to the room, turned round. "Oh! oh!" he said.

"A note in the keyhole!" exclaimed De Saint-Aignan.

"That is not unlikely to be the one we want, Monsieur the Count," said Porthos.

De Saint-Aignan took out the paper. "A note from M. de Bragelonne!" he exclaimed.

"You see, Monsieur, I was right. Oh, when I say a thing —"

"Brought here by M. de Bragelonne himself," the count murmured, turning pale. "This is infamous! How could he possibly have come here?" and the count rang again.

"Who has been here during my absence with the king?"

"No one, Monsieur."

"That is impossible. Some one must have been here."

"No one could possibly have entered, Monsieur; since I kept the keys in my own pocket."

"And yet I find this letter in that lock yonder. Some one must have put it there; it could not have come alone."

Basque opened his arms, as if signifying the most absolute ignorance on the subject.

"Probably it was M. de Bragelonne himself who placed it there," said Porthos.

"In that case he must have entered here."

"Without doubt, Monsieur."

"How could that have been, since I have the key in my own pocket?" returned Basque, perseveringly.

De Saint-Aignan crumpled up the letter in his hand, after having read it. "There is something mysterious about this," he murmured, absorbed in thought.

Porthos left him to his reflections; but after a while returned to the mission he had undertaken. "Shall we return to our little affair?" he said, addressing De Saint-Aignan, as soon as the lackey had disappeared.

"I think I can now understand it, from this note which has arrived here in so singular a manner. M. de Bragelonne says that a friend will call."

"I am his friend, and am the one he alludes to."

"For the purpose of giving me a challenge?"

"Precisely."

"And he complains that I have offended him?"

"Mortally so."

"In what way, may I ask?—for his conduct is so mysterious that it at least needs some explanation."

"Monsieur," replied Porthos, "my friend cannot but be right; and so far as his conduct is concerned, if it be mysterious, as you say, you have only yourself to blame for it."

Porthos pronounced these words with an amount of confidence which for a man who was unaccustomed to his ways must have indicated an infinity of sense.

"Mystery? Be it so; but what is the mystery about?" said De Saint-Aignan.

"You will think it best, perhaps," Porthos replied, with a low bow, "that I do not enter into particulars, and for excellent reasons."

"Oh, I perfectly understand you! We will touch very lightly upon it, then. So speak, Monsieur; I am listening."

"In the first place, Monsieur," said Porthos, "you have changed your apartments."

"Yes, that is quite true," said De Saint-Aignan.

"You admit it, then," said Porthos, with an air of satisfaction.

"Admit it! of course I admit it. Why should I not admit it, do you suppose?"

"You have admitted it. Very good," said Porthos, lifting up one finger.

"But how can my having moved my lodgings have done M. de Bragelonne any harm? Have the goodness to tell me that, for I positively do not comprehend a word of what you are saying."

Porthos stopped him, and then said with great gravity: "Monsieur, this is the first of M. de Bragelonne's complaints against you. If he makes a complaint, it is because he feels himself insulted."

De Saint-Aignan began to beat his foot impatiently on the floor. "This looks like a bad quarrel," he said.

"No one can possibly have a bad quarrel with the Vicomte de Bragelonne," returned Porthos; "but, at all events, you have nothing to add on the subject of your changing your apartments, I suppose?"

"Nothing. And what is the next point?"

"Ah, the next! You will observe, Monsieur, that the one I have already mentioned is a most serious injury, to which you have given no answer, or rather have answered very indifferently. So, Monsieur, you change your lodg-

ings ; that offends M. de Bragelonne, and you do not attempt to excuse yourself? Very well!"

"What!" cried De Saint-Aignan, who was irritated by the coolness of his visitor, — "what! Am I to consult M. de Bragelonne whether I am to move or not? You can hardly be serious, Monsieur."

"Absolutely necessary, Monsieur; but, under any circumstances, you will admit that it is nothing in comparison with the second ground of complaint."

"Well, what is that?"

Porthos assumed a very serious expression as he said, "How about the trap-door, Monsieur?"

De Saint-Aignan turned exceedingly pale. He pushed back his chair so abruptly that Porthos, simple as he was, perceived that the blow had told. "The trap-door?" murmured De Saint-Aignan.

"Yes, Monsieur, explain that if you can," said Porthos, shaking his head.

De Saint-Aignan held down his head. "Oh, I have been betrayed," he murmured; "everything is known!"

"Everything," replied Porthos, who knew nothing.

"You see me overwhelmed," pursued De Saint-Aignan, — "overwhelmed to such a degree that I hardly know what I am about."

"A guilty conscience, Monsieur! Your affair is a bad one."

"Monsieur!"

"And when the public shall learn all about it, and will judge —"

"Oh, Monsieur!" exclaimed the count, hurriedly, "such a secret ought not to be known, even by one's confessor!"

"That we will think about," said Porthos; "the secret will not go far, in fact."



"But, Monsieur," returned De Saint-Aignan, "is M. de Bragelonne, in penetrating the secret, aware of the danger to which he exposes himself and others?"

"M. de Bragelonne incurs no danger, Monsieur, nor does he fear any either, — as you, if it please Heaven, will find out very soon."

"This fellow is a perfect madman," thought De Saint-Aignan. "What, in Heaven's name, does he want?" He then said aloud: "Come, Monsieur, let us hush up this affair."

"You forget the portrait!" said Porthos, in a voice of thunder, which made the count's blood freeze in his veins.

As the portrait in question was La Vallière's portrait, and as no mistake could any longer exist on the subject, De Saint-Aignan's eyes were completely opened. "Ah," he exclaimed, — "ah, Monsieur, I remember now that M. de Bragelonne was engaged to be married to her."

Porthos assumed an imposing air — all the majesty of ignorance, in fact — as he said: "It matters nothing whatever to me, nor to yourself indeed, whether or not my friend was, as you say, engaged to be married. I am even astonished that you should have made use of so indiscreet a remark. It may possibly do your cause harm, Monsieur."

"Monsieur," replied De Saint-Aignan, "you are the incarnation of intelligence, delicacy, and loyalty of feeling united. I see the whole matter now clearly enough."

"So much the better," said Porthos.

"And," pursued De Saint-Aignan, "you have made me comprehend it in the most ingenious and the most delicate manner possible. Thank you, Monsieur, thank you." Porthos drew himself up. "Only, now that I know everything, permit me to explain —"

Porthos shook his head as a man who does not wish to hear ; but De Saint-Aignan continued : “ I am in despair, I assure you, at all that has happened ; but how would you have acted in my place ? Come, between ourselves, tell me what would you have done ? ”

Porthos raised his head. “ There is no question at all of what I should have done, young man ; you have now,” he said, “ been made acquainted with the three causes of complaint against you, I believe ? ”

“ As for the first, my change of rooms, — and I now address myself to you, as a man of honor and of great intelligence, — could I, when the desire of so august a personage was so urgently expressed that I should move, ought I to have disobeyed ? ”

Porthos was about to speak, but De Saint-Aignan did not give him time to answer. “ Ah ! my frankness, I see, convinces you,” he said, interpreting the movement in his own interest. “ You perceive that I am right ? ”

Porthos did not reply. De Saint-Aignan continued : “ I pass to that unfortunate trap-door,” placing his hand on Porthos’s arm, — “ that trap-door, the occasion and the means of so much unhappiness, and which was constructed for — you know what. Well, then, in plain truth, do you suppose that it was I who, of my own accord, in such a place too, had that trap-door made ? Oh, no ! you do not believe it ; and here, again, you feel, you guess, you understand the influence of a will superior to my own. You can conceive the infatuation, — I do not speak of love, that madness irresistible ! But, thank Heaven ! happily the affair is with a man who has so much sensitiveness of feeling. If it were not so, indeed, what an amount of misery and scandal would fall upon her, poor girl ! and upon him — whom I will not name.”

Porthos, confused and bewildered by the eloquence and gestures of De Saint-Aignan, made a thousand efforts to stem this torrent of words, of which, by the by, he did not understand a single one; he remained upright and motionless on his seat, and that was all he could do.

De Saint-Aignan continued, and gave a new inflection to his voice, and an increasing vehemence to his gesture: "As for the portrait, — for I readily believe the portrait is the principal cause of complaint, — tell me candidly if you think me to blame? Who was it that wished to have her portrait? Was it I? Who is in love with her? Is it I? Who desires her? who has won her? Is it I? No, a thousand times no! I know M. de Bragelonne must be in a state of despair; I know these misfortunes are most cruel. But I, too, am suffering as well; and yet there is no possibility of offering any resistance. If he struggles, he will be derided; if he resists, he is lost. You will tell me, I know, that despair is madness; but you are reasonable, — you have understood me. I perceive by your serious, thoughtful, embarrassed air, even, that the importance of the situation in which we are placed has not escaped you. Return, therefore, to M. de Bragelonne; thank him — as I have indeed reason to thank him — for having chosen as an intermediary a man of your merit. Believe me that I shall, on my side, preserve an eternal gratitude for the man who has so ingeniously, so cleverly corrected the misunderstanding between us. And since ill-luck would have it that the secret should be known to four instead of to three, why, this secret, which might make the most ambitious man's fortune, I am delighted to share with you, Monsieur; from the bottom of my heart I am delighted at it. From this very moment you can make use of me as you please; I place myself entirely at your mercy. What can I possibly do for you?

What can I solicit, nay, require even? Speak, Monsieur, speak!"

According to the familiarly friendly fashion of that period, De Saint-Aignan threw his arms round Porthos, and clasped him tenderly in his embrace. Porthos allowed him to do this with the most complete indifference.

"Speak!" resumed De Saint-Aignan; "what do you require?"

"Monsieur," said Porthos, "I have a horse below; be good enough to mount him. He is a very good one, and will play you no tricks."

"Mount on horseback! What for?" inquired De Saint-Aignan, with no little curiosity.

"To accompany me where M. de Bragelonne is awaiting us."

"Ah! he wishes to speak to me, I suppose? I can well believe that; he wishes to have the details, very likely. Alas! it is a very delicate matter; but at the present moment I cannot, for the king is waiting for me."

"The king will wait," said Porthos.

"But where is M. de Bragelonne expecting me?"

"At the Minimes, at Vincennes."

"Ah, indeed! but are we going to laugh over the affair when we get there?"

"I don't think it likely, — not I, at least;" and the face of Porthos assumed a stern hardness of expression. "The Minimes is a rendezvous for duels."

"Very well; what, then, have I to do at the Minimes?"

Porthos slowly drew his sword, and said, "That is the length of my friend's sword."

"Why, the man is mad!" cried De Saint-Aignan.

The color mounted to Porthos's face, as he replied: "If I had not the honor of being in your own apartment, Monsieur, and of representing M. de Bragelonne's interests, I

would throw you out of the window. It will be merely a pleasure postponed, and you will lose nothing by waiting. Will you come to the Minimes, Monsieur?"

"Eh!"

"Will you go thither of your own free will?"

"But —"

"I will carry you if you do not come. Take care!"

"Basque!" cried M. de Saint-Aignan. As soon as Basque appeared, he said, "The king wishes to see Monsieur the Count."

"That is very different," said Porthos; "the king's service before everything else. We will wait there until this evening, Monsieur." And saluting De Saint-Aignan with his usual courtesy, Porthos left the room, delighted at having arranged another affair.

De Saint-Aignan looked after him as he left; and then hastily putting on his coat again, he ran off, arranging his dress as he went along, muttering to himself: "The Minimes! the Minimes! We will see how the king will like this challenge; for it is for him, after all, *pardieu!*"

## CHAPTER XVI.

## RIVAL POLITICS.

ON his return from the ride which had been so prolific in poetical effusions, and in which every one had paid tribute to the Muses, as the poets of the period used to say, the king found M. Fouquet waiting for an audience. Behind the king came M. Colbert, who had met the king in the corridor, as if on the watch for him, and followed him like a jealous and watchful shadow, — M. Colbert, with his square head, and his vulgar and untidy though rich costume, which gave him some resemblance to a Flemish gentleman after drinking beer. Fouquet, at the sight of his enemy, remained unmoved, and during the whole of the scene which followed observed that line of conduct so difficult to a man of refinement whose heart is filled with contempt, but who wishes to suppress every indication of it, lest he may do his adversary too much honor. Colbert did not conceal his insolent joy. In his opinion, M. Fouquet's was a game very badly played and hopelessly lost, although not yet finished. Colbert belonged to that school of politicians who think cleverness alone worthy of their admiration, and success the only thing worth caring for. Colbert, moreover, who was not simply an envious and jealous man, but who had the king's interest really at heart, because he was thoroughly imbued with the highest sense of probity in all matters of figures and accounts, could well afford to assign as a pretext for his conduct, that in hating and doing his utmost to ruin M. Fouquet



he had nothing in view but the welfare of the State and the dignity of the crown.

None of these details escaped Fouquet's observation. Through his enemy's thick, bushy brows, and despite the restless movement of his eyelids, he could, by merely looking at his eyes, penetrate to the very bottom of Colbert's heart ; he saw, then, all there was in that heart, — hatred and triumph. But as he wished, while observing everything, to remain himself impenetrable, he composed his features, smiled with that charmingly sympathetic smile which was peculiarly his own, and saluted the king with the most dignified and graceful ease and elasticity of manner. "Sire," he said, "I perceive by your Majesty's joyous air that you have had a pleasant ride."

"Charming, indeed, Monsieur the Superintendent, charming ! You were very wrong not to come with us as I invited you to do."

"I was working, Sire," replied the superintendent, who did not take the trouble to turn aside his head even in recognition of Colbert's presence.

"Ah ! M. Fouquet," cried the king, "there is nothing like the country. I should be delighted to live in the country always, in the open air and under the trees."

"Oh ! your Majesty is not yet weary of the throne, I trust ?" said Fouquet.

"No ; but thrones of soft turf are very delightful."

"Your Majesty gratifies my utmost wishes in speaking in that manner, for I have a request to submit to you."

"On whose behalf, Monsieur ?"

"On behalf of the nymphs of Vaux, Sire."

"Ah ! ah !" said Louis XIV.

"Your Majesty once deigned to make me a promise," said Fouquet.

"Yes, I remember it."

"The *fête* at Vaux, the celebrated *fête*, is it not, Sire?" said Colbert, endeavoring to show his importance by taking part in the conversation.

Fouquet, with the profoundest contempt, did not take the slightest notice of the remark, as if, so far as he was concerned, Colbert had not spoken. "Your Majesty is aware," he said, "that I destine my estate at Vaux to receive the most amiable of princes, the most powerful of monarchs."

"I have given you my promise, Monsieur," said Louis XIV., smiling; "and a king never departs from his word."

"And I have come now, Sire, to inform your Majesty that I am ready to obey your orders in every respect."

"Do you promise me many wonders, Monsieur the Superintendent?" said Louis, looking at Colbert.

"Wonders? Oh, no, Sire! I do not undertake that; but I hope to be able to procure your Majesty a little pleasure, perhaps even a little forgetfulness of the cares of State."

"Nay, nay, M. Fouquet," returned the king; "I insist upon the word 'wonders.' Oh, you are a magician! We know your power; we know that you could find gold, even were there none in the world. And, in fact, people say you make it."

Fouquet felt that the shot was discharged from a double quiver, and that the king had launched an arrow from his own bow as well as one from Colbert's. "Oh!" said he, laughingly, "the people know perfectly well out of what mine I procure the gold; they know it only too well, perhaps. Besides," he added proudly, "I can assure your Majesty that the gold destined to pay the expenses of the *fête* at Vaux will cost neither blood nor tears; hard labor it may, perhaps, but that can be paid for."

Louis remained silent ; he wished to look at Colbert. Colbert, too, wished to reply ; but a glance as swift as an eagle's, — a proud, loyal, king-like glance, indeed, — which Fouquet darted at the latter, arrested the words upon his lips. The king, who had by this time recovered his self-possession, turned towards Fouquet, saying, " I presume, therefore, I am now to consider myself formally invited ? "

" Yes, Sire, if it pleases your Majesty. "

" For what day ? "

" Any day your Majesty may find most convenient. "

" You speak like an enchanter who improvises, M. Fouquet. I could not say so much, indeed. "

" Your Majesty will do, whenever you please, everything that a monarch can and ought to do. The King of France has servants at his bidding who are able to do anything on his behalf, to accomplish everything to gratify his pleasures. "

Colbert tried to look at the superintendent in order to see whether this remark was an approach to less hostile sentiments on his part. But Fouquet had not even looked at his enemy ; so far as he was concerned, Colbert did not exist.

" Very good, then, " said the king ; " will a week hence suit you ? "

" Perfectly well, Sire. "

" This is Tuesday ; if I give you until next Sunday week, will that be sufficient ? "

" The delay which your Majesty deigns to accord me will greatly aid the various works which my architects have in hand for the purpose of adding to the amusement of your Majesty and your friends. "

" By the by, speaking of my friends, " resumed the king ; " how do you intend to treat them ? "

" The king is master everywhere, Sire ; your Majesty

will draw up your own list and give your own orders. All those you may deign to invite will be my guests, — my honored guests indeed."

"I thank you!" returned the king, touched by the noble thought expressed in so noble a tone.

Fouquet therefore took leave of Louis XIV., after a few words had been added with regard to the details of certain matters of business. He felt that Colbert would remain behind with the king, that they would both converse about him, and that neither of them would spare him in the least degree. The satisfaction of being able to give a last and terrible blow to his enemy seemed to him almost like a compensation for everything to which they were about to subject him. He turned back again immediately, when he had already reached the door, and addressing the king, "Pardon, Sire," said he, — "pardon!"

"Pardon for what?" said the king, graciously.

"For a serious fault which I committed unawares."

"A fault! You! Ah, M. Fouquet, I shall be unable to do otherwise than forgive you. In what way or against whom have you been found wanting?"

"Against all propriety, Sire. I forgot to inform your Majesty of a circumstance of considerable importance."

"What is it?"

Colbert trembled; he expected a denunciation. His conduct had been unmasked. A single syllable from Fouquet, a single proof formally advanced, and before the youthful loyalty of Louis XIV. Colbert's favor would disappear at once. The latter trembled, therefore, lest so daring a blow might not overthrow his whole scaffold. In point of fact, the opportunity was so admirably suited to be taken advantage of, that a skilful player like Aramis would not have let it slip. "Sire," said Fouquet, with an easy air, "since you have had the kindness to forgive

me, I am indifferent about my confession : this morning I sold one of the official appointments I hold."

"One of your appointments?" said the king; "which?"

Colbert turned livid. "That which conferred upon me, Sire, a grand gown and an air of gravity, — the appointment of *procureur-général*."

The king involuntarily uttered a loud exclamation and looked at Colbert, who with his face bedewed with perspiration felt almost on the point of fainting. "To whom have you sold this appointment, M. Fouquet?" inquired the king.

Colbert was obliged to lean against the side of the fireplace.

"To a councillor belonging to the parliament, Sire, whose name is Vanel."

"Vanel?"

"A friend of the intendant Colbert," added Fouquet, letting every word fall from his lips with inimitable nonchalance, and with an admirably assumed expression of forgetfulness and ignorance which neither painter, actor, nor poet could reproduce with brush, gesture, or pen. Then having finished, having overwhelmed Colbert beneath the weight of this superiority, the superintendent again saluted the king and quitted the room, partially revenged by the stupefaction of the king and the humiliation of the favorite.

"Is it really possible," said the king, as soon as Fouquet had disappeared, "that he has sold that office?"

"Yes, Sire," said Colbert, meaningly.

"He must be mad," the king added.

Colbert this time did not reply; he had penetrated the king's thought. That thought promised him revenge. His hatred was augmented by jealousy; and a threat of disgrace was now added to the plan he had arranged for

his ruin. Colbert felt assured that for the future, as between Louis XIV. and himself, his hostile ideas would meet with no obstacles, and that at the first fault committed by Fouquet which could be laid hold of as a pretext, the chastisement impending over him would be precipitated. Fouquet had thrown aside his weapons of defence ; Hate and Jealousy had picked them up.

Colbert was invited by the king to the *fête* at Vaux ; he bowed like a man confident in himself, and accepted the invitation with the air of one who confers a favor. The king was about writing down De Saint-Aignan's name on his list of invitations, when the usher announced the Comte de Saint-Aignan. As soon as the royal "Mercury" entered, Colbert discreetly withdrew.



## CHAPTER XVII.

## RIVAL LOVERS.

DE SAINT-AIGNAN had quitted Louis XIV. hardly two hours before ; but in the first effervescence of his affection, whenever Louis XIV. did not see La Vallière he was obliged to talk of her. Now, the only person with whom he could speak about her at his ease was De Saint-Aignan, and that person had therefore become indispensable to him.

“ Ah ! is that you, Count ? ” the king exclaimed, as soon as he perceived him, — doubly delighted, not only to see him again, but also to get rid of Colbert, whose scowling face always put him out of humor, — “ so much the better. I am very glad to see you ; you will make one of the travelling-party, I suppose ? ”

“ Of what travelling-party are you speaking, Sire ? ” inquired De Saint-Aignan.

“ The one we are making up to go to the *fête* the superintendent is about to give at Vaux. Ah ! De Saint-Aignan, you will at last see a *fête*, a royal *fête*, by the side of which all our amusements at Fontainebleau are petty, contemptible affairs.”

“ At Vaux ? — the superintendent going to give a *fête* in your Majesty’s honor ? Nothing more than that ! ”

“ ‘ Nothing more than that ! ’ do you say ? It is very diverting to find you treating it with so much disdain. Are you, who express such indifference on the subject, aware that as soon as it is known that M. Fouquet is

going to receive me at Vaux next Sunday week, people will be striving their very utmost to get invited to the *fête*? I repeat, De Saint-Aignan, you shall be one of the invited guests."

"Very well, Sire; unless I shall in the mean time have undertaken a longer and less agreeable journey."

"What journey?"

"The one across the Styx, Sire."

"Bah!" said Louis XIV., laughing.

"No, seriously, Sire," replied De Saint-Aignan, "I am invited there; and in such a way, in truth, that I hardly know what to say or how to act in order to refuse it."

"I do not understand you. I know that you are in a poetical vein; but try not to sink from Apollo to Phœbus."

"Very well; if your Majesty will deign to listen to me, I will not keep you in suspense any longer."

"Speak!"

"Your Majesty knows the Baron du Vallon?"

"Yes, indeed, — a good servant to my father, the late king, and an admirable companion at table; for I think you are referring to him who dined with us at Fontainebleau?"

"Precisely; but you have omitted to add to his other qualifications, Sire, that he is a most charming killer of people."

"What! does M. du Vallon wish to kill you?"

"Or to get me killed, — which is the same thing."

"Bless my heart!"

"Do not laugh, Sire, for I am not saying a word that is not the exact truth."

"And you say he wishes to get you killed?"

"That is that excellent person's present idea."

"Be easy; I will defend you, if he be in the wrong."

"Ah ! there is an 'if.' "

"Of course ! Answer me as candidly as if it were some one else's affair instead of your own, my poor De Saint-Aignan : is he right or wrong ? "

"Your Majesty shall be the judge."

"What have you done to him ? "

"To him, personally, nothing at all ; but it seems I have to one of his friends."

"It is all the same. Is his friend one of the celebrated 'four' ? "

"No ! It is only the son of one of the celebrated 'four.' "

"What have you done to the son ? Come, tell me."

"Why, I have helped some one to take his mistress from him."

"You confess it, then ? "

"I cannot help confessing it, for it is true."

"In that case you are wrong."

"Ah ! I am wrong ? "

"Yes ; and, my faith, if he kills you — "

"Well ? "

"Well, he will do what is right."

"Ah ! that is your Majesty's way of reasoning, then ? "

"Do you think it a bad way ? "

"It is a very expeditious way, at all events."

"'Good justice is prompt ; ' so my grandfather Henry IV. used to say."

"In that case your Majesty will immediately sign my adversary's pardon, for he is now waiting for me at the Minimes to kill me."

"His name, and a parchment ! "

"There is a parchment upon your Majesty's table ; and as for his name — "

"Well, what is it ? "

"The Vicomte de Bragelonne, Sire."

"The Vicomte de Bragelonne!" exclaimed the king, changing from a fit of laughter to the most profound stupor; and then after a moment's silence, while he wiped his forehead, which was bedewed with perspiration, he again murmured, "Bragelonne!"

"No other than he, Sire."

"Bragelonne, who was affianced to —"

"Yes, Sire."

"He was in London, however."

"Yes; but I can assure you, Sire, he is there no longer."

"Is he in Paris?"

"He is at the Minimes, Sire, where he is waiting for me, as I have already had the honor of telling you."

"Does he know all?"

"Yes; and many things besides. Perhaps your Majesty would like to look at the letter I have received from him;" and De Saint-Aignan drew from his pocket the note with which we are already acquainted. "When your Majesty has read the letter, I will tell you how it reached me."

The king read it in great agitation, and immediately said, "Well?"

"Well, Sire; your Majesty knows a certain carved lock, closing a certain door of ebony-wood, which separates a certain apartment from a certain blue and white sanctuary?"

"Of course! Louise's boudoir."

"Yes, Sire. Well, it was in the key-hole of that lock that I found that note. Who placed it there? Either M. de Bragelonne, or the devil himself; but inasmuch as the note smells of amber and not of sulphur, I conclude that it must be, not the devil, but M. de Bragelonne."

Louis bent down his head, and seemed absorbed in sad and melancholy reflections. Perhaps something like remorse was at that moment passing through his heart. "Oh!" he said, "that secret discovered!"

"Sire, I shall do my utmost that the secret dies in the breast of the man who possesses it," said De Saint-Aignan, in a tone of bravado, as he moved towards the door; but a gesture of the king made him pause.

"Where are you going?" he inquired.

"Where I am waited for, Sire."

"What for?"

"To fight, in all probability."

"You fight!" exclaimed the king. "One moment, if you please, Monsieur the Count!"

De Saint-Aignan shook his head, as a rebellious child does whenever any one interferes to prevent him from throwing himself into a well or playing with a knife. "But yet, Sire —" he said.

"In the first place," continued the king, "I require to be enlightened a little."

"Upon that point, if your Majesty will be pleased to interrogate me," replied De Saint-Aignan, "I will throw what light I can."

"Who told you that M. de Bragelonne had penetrated into that room?"

"The letter which I found in the key-hole told me so."

"Who told you that it was De Bragelonne who put it there?"

"Who but himself would have dared to undertake such a mission?"

"You are right. How was he able to get into your rooms?"

"Ah! that is very serious, inasmuch as all the doors

were closed, and my lackey, Basque, had the keys in his pocket."

"Your lackey must have been bribed."

"Impossible, Sire; for if he had been bribed, those who did so would not have sacrificed the poor fellow, whom it is not unlikely they might want to turn to further use by and by, in showing so clearly that it was he of whom they had made use."

"Quite true. And now there remains but one conjecture."

"Let us see, Sire, if it is the same that has presented itself to my mind."

"That he effected an entrance by means of the staircase."

"Alas! Sire, that seems to me more than probable."

"There is no doubt that some one sold the secret of the trap-door."

"Either sold it or gave it."

"Why do you make that distinction?"

"Because there are certain persons, Sire, who being above the price of a treason give, and do not sell."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, Sire, your Majesty's mind is too clear-sighted not to guess what I mean, and you will save me the embarrassment of naming any one."

"You are right: you mean Madame!"

"Ah!" said De Saint-Aignan.

"Madame, whose suspicions were aroused by your changing your lodgings."

"Madame, who has keys of the apartments of her maids of honor, and is powerful enough to discover what no one but yourself or she would be able to discover."

"And you suppose, then, that my sister has entered into an alliance with Bragelonne?"

"Eh! eh! Sire —"



"So far as to inform him of all the details of the affair?"

"Perhaps even further still."

"Further? What do you mean?"

"Perhaps to the point of going with him."

"Which way, — through your own apartments?"

"You think it impossible, Sire? Well, listen to me! Your Majesty knows that Madame is very fond of perfumes?"

"Yes, she acquired that taste from my mother."

"Vervain particularly."

"Yes, it is the scent she prefers to all others."

"Very good, Sire! my apartments smell very strongly of vervain."

The king remained silent and thoughtful for a few moments, and then resumed: "But why should Madame take Bragelonne's part against me?" De Saint-Aignan could very easily have replied: "A woman's jealousy!" In his question the king had probed his friend to the bottom of his heart to ascertain if he had learned the secret of his flirtation with his sister-in-law. But De Saint-Aignan was not an ordinary courtier; he did not lightly run the risk of finding out family secrets; and he was too good a friend of the Muses not to think very frequently of poor Ovidius Naso, whose eyes shed so many tears in expiation of his crime for having once beheld something, one hardly knows what, in the palace of Augustus. He therefore passed by Madame's secret very skilfully. But since he had exhibited his sagacity in proving Madame's presence in his rooms with Bragelonne, it was now necessary for him to pay interest on that self-conceit, and reply clearly to the question, "Why has Madame taken Bragelonne's part against me?"

"Why?" replied De Saint-Aignan. "Your Majesty

forgets, I presume, that the Comte de Guiche is the intimate friend of the Vicomte de Bragelonne?"

"I do not see the connection; however," said the king.

"Ah! I beg your pardon then, Sire; but I thought the Comte de Guiche was a very great friend of Madame."

"Quite true," the king returned. "There is no occasion to search any further; the blow came from that direction."

"And is not your Majesty of the opinion that in order to ward it off it will be necessary to deal another blow?"

"Yes; but not one of the kind given in the Bois de Vincennes," replied the king.

"You forget, Sire," said De Saint-Aignan, "that I am a gentleman, and that I have been challenged."

"The challenge neither concerns nor was it intended for you."

"But it is I who have been expected at the Minimes, Sire, during the last hour and more; and I shall be dishonored if I do not go there."

"The first honor and duty of a gentleman is obedience to his sovereign."

"Sire!"

"I order you to remain."

"Sire!"

"Obey, Monsieur!"

"As your Majesty pleases."

"Besides, I wish to have the whole of this affair explained; I wish to know how it is that I have been so insolently trifled with as to have the sanctuary of my affection pried into. It is not you, De Saint-Aignan, who ought to punish those who have acted in this manner; for it is not your honor they have attacked, but my own."

"I implore your Majesty not to overwhelm M. de Bragelonne with your wrath; for although in the whole of this

affair he may have shown himself deficient in prudence, he has not been so in his feelings of loyalty."

"Enough! I shall know how to decide between the just and the unjust, even in the height of my anger. But take care that not a word of this is breathed to Madame!"

"But what am I to do with regard to M. de Bragelonne? He will be seeking me in every direction, and —"

"I shall either have spoken to him, or taken care that he has been spoken to before the evening is over."

"Let me once more entreat your Majesty to be indulgent towards him."

"I have been indulgent long enough, Count," said Louis XIV., frowning; "it is time to show certain persons that I am master in my own palace."

The king had hardly pronounced these words, which betokened that a fresh feeling of dissatisfaction was mingled with the remembrance of an old one, when the usher appeared at the door of the cabinet. "What is the matter," inquired the king, "and why do you presume to come when I have not summoned you?"

"Sire," said the usher, "your Majesty desired me to permit M. le Comte de la Fère to pass freely at any time when he might wish to speak to your Majesty."

"Well?"

"M. le Comte de la Fère is now waiting to see your Majesty."

The king and De Saint-Aignan at this reply exchanged a look which betrayed more uneasiness than surprise. Louis hesitated for a moment, but almost immediately forming a resolution, he said: "Go, De Saint-Aignan, and find Louise; inform her of the plot against us. Do not let her be ignorant that Madame is beginning again her persecutions, and that she has set to work those who would have done better had they remained neutral."

“Sire — ”

“If Louise gets nervous and frightened, reassure her ; tell her that the king’s love is an impenetrable shield over her. If, as I suspect is the case, she already knows everything, or if she has already been herself subjected to an attack, tell her, be sure to tell her, De Saint-Aignan,” added the king, trembling with passion, — “tell her, I say, that this time, instead of defending her, I will avenge her, and that too so terribly that no one will in future even dare to raise his eyes towards her.”

“Is that all, Sire ?”

“Yes ; all. Go quickly, and remain faithful, — you who live in the midst of this hell without having, like myself, the hope of paradise.”

De Saint-Aignan almost exhausted himself in protestations of devotion, took the king’s hand, kissed it, and left the room radiant with delight.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## KING AND NOBILITY.

THE king endeavored to recover his self-possession as quickly as possible, in order to meet M. de la Fère with an undisturbed countenance. He clearly saw that it was not mere chance which had induced the count's visit. He had a vague impression of the serious import of that visit; but he felt that to a man of Athos's tone of mind, to a person so distinguished, nothing disagreeable or disordered should be presented. As soon as the king had satisfied himself that so far as appearances were concerned he was perfectly calm again, he gave directions to the ushers to introduce the count.

A few minutes afterwards Athos, in full court dress and with his breast covered with the orders that he alone had the right to wear at the Court of France, presented himself with so grave and solemn an air that the king perceived at the first glance that he had not been mistaken in his anticipations. Louis advanced a step towards the count, and with a smile held out his hand to him, over which Athos bowed with the air of the deepest respect.

"M. le Comte de la Fère," said the king, rapidly, "you are so seldom here that it is a very great happiness to see you."

Athos bowed and replied, "I should wish always to enjoy the happiness of being near your Majesty."

That reply, made in that tone, evidently signified, "I should wish to be one of your Majesty's advisers, to save

you from the commission of faults." The king so understood it, and determined in this man's presence to preserve all the advantages which could be derived from his command over himself as well as from his rank and position.

"I see you have something to say to me," he said.

"Had it not been so, I should not have presumed to present myself before your Majesty."

"Speak quickly ; I am anxious to satisfy you," returned the king, seating himself.

"I am persuaded," replied Athos, in a slightly agitated tone of voice, "that your Majesty will give me every satisfaction."

"Ah !" said the king, with a certain haughtiness of manner, "you have come to lodge a complaint here, then ?"

"It would be a complaint," returned Athos, "only in the event of your Majesty — But if you will deign to permit me, Sire, I will begin the conversation at the beginning."

"I am listening."

"Your Majesty will remember that at the period of the Duke of Buckingham's departure I had the honor of an interview with you."

"At or about that period I think I remember you did ; only, with regard to the subject of the conversation, I have quite forgotten it."

Athos started, as he replied : "I shall have the honor to recall it to your Majesty. It was with regard to a demand which I addressed to you respecting a marriage which M. de Bragelonne wished to contract with Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

"Ah !" thought the king, "we have come to it now. I remember," he said, aloud.

"At that period," pursued Athos, "your Majesty was so kind and generous towards M. de Bragelonne and my-



self that not a single word which then fell from your lips has escaped my memory ; and when I asked your Majesty to accord me Mademoiselle de la Vallière's hand for M. de Bragelonne, you refused."

"Quite true," said Louis, dryly.

"Alleging," Athos hastened to say, "that the young lady had no position in society."

Louis could hardly force himself to listen patiently.

"That," added Athos, "she had but little fortune."

The king threw himself back in his arm-chair.

"That her extraction was indifferent."

A renewed impatience on the part of the king.

"And little beauty," added Athos, pitilessly.

This last bolt buried itself deep in the king's heart, and made him almost bound from his seat.

"You have a good memory, Monsieur," he said.

"I invariably have, on all occasions when I have had the distinguished honor of an interview with your Majesty," retorted the count, without being in the least disconcerted.

"Very good ; it is admitted I said all that."

"And I thanked your Majesty, because those words testified an interest in M. de Bragelonne, which did him much honor."

"And you may possibly remember," said the king, very deliberately, "that you had the greatest repugnance to this marriage ?"

"Quite true, Sire."

"And that you solicited my permission against your own inclination ?"

"Yes, Sire."

"And, finally, I remember also, — for I have a memory nearly as good as your own, — I remember, I say, that you observed at the time : 'I do not believe that Mademoiselle de la Vallière loves M. de Bragelonne.' Is that true ?"

The blow told well, but Athos did not shrink. "Sire," he said, "I have already begged your Majesty's forgiveness ; but there are certain particulars in that conversation which will be intelligible in the *dénouement*."

"Well, what is the *dénouement*, Monsieur?"

"This : your Majesty then said that you would defer the marriage out of regard for M. de Bragelonne's own interests."

The king remained silent.

"M. de Bragelonne is now so exceedingly unhappy that he cannot any longer defer asking your Majesty for a solution of the matter."

The king turned pale ; Athos looked at him with fixed attention.

"And what," said the king, with considerable hesitation, "does M. de Bragelonne request?"

"Precisely the very thing that I came to ask your Majesty for at my last audience ; namely, your Majesty's consent to his marriage."

The king remained silent.

"The obstacles in the way are all now quite removed for us," continued Athos. "Mademoiselle de la Vallière, without fortune, birth, or beauty, is not the less on that account the only good match in the world for M. de Bragelonne, since he loves this young girl."

The king pressed his hands impatiently together.

"Does your Majesty hesitate?" inquired the count, without losing a particle either of his firmness or his politeness.

"I do not hesitate, — I refuse," replied the king.

Athos paused a moment, as if to collect himself. "I have had the honor," he said in a mild tone, "to observe to your Majesty that no obstacle now interferes with M. de Bragelonne's affections, and that his determination seems unalterable."

"There is my will, — and that is an obstacle, I should imagine!"

"That is the most serious of all," Athos replied quickly.

"Ah!"

"And may we therefore be permitted to ask your Majesty, with the greatest humility, for your reason for this refusal?"

"The reason! A question to me!" exclaimed the king.

"A demand, Sire!"

The king, leaning with both his hands upon the table, said in a deep tone of concentrated passion: "You have lost all recollection of what is usual at court. At court no one questions the king."

"Very true, Sire; but if men do not question, they conjecture."

"Conjecture! What may that mean, Monsieur?"

"Almost always the conjecture of the subject impugns the frankness of the king."

"Monsieur!"

"And a want of confidence on the part of the subject," pursued Athos, intrepidly.

"You are forgetting yourself," said the king, hurried away by his anger in spite of his control over himself.

"Sire, I am obliged to seek elsewhere for what I thought I should find in your Majesty. Instead of obtaining a reply from you, I am compelled to make one for myself."

The king rose. "Monsieur the Count," he said, "I have now given you all the time I had at my disposal."

This was a dismissal.

"Sire," replied the count, "I have not yet had time to tell your Majesty what I came with the express object of saying, and I so rarely see your Majesty that I ought to avail myself of the opportunity."

"Just now you spoke of conjectures; you are now becoming offensive, Monsieur."

"Oh, Sire, offend your Majesty! I? Never! All my life have I maintained that kings are above all other men, not only in rank and power, but in nobleness of heart and dignity of mind. I never can bring myself to believe that my sovereign — he who passed his word to me — did so with a mental reservation."

"What do you mean? What mental reservation?"

"I will explain my meaning," said Athos, coldly. "If in refusing Mademoiselle de la Vallière to M. de Bragelonne your Majesty had some other object in view than the happiness and fortune of the viscount —"

"You perceive, Monsieur, that you are offending me."

"If in requiring the viscount to delay his marriage your Majesty's only object was to remove the gentleman to whom Mademoiselle de la Vallière was engaged —"

"Monsieur! Monsieur!"

"I have heard it said so in every direction, Sire. Your Majesty's love for Mademoiselle de la Vallière is spoken of on all sides."

The king tore his gloves, which he had been biting for some time. "Woe to those," he cried, "who interfere in my affairs! I have chosen my course; I will crush all obstacles."

"What obstacles?" said Athos.

The king stopped short, like a runaway horse whose bit being turned in his mouth bruises his palate. "I love Mademoiselle de la Vallière," he said suddenly, with nobleness and with passion.

"But," interrupted Athos, "that does not preclude your Majesty from allowing M. de Bragelonne to marry Mademoiselle de la Vallière. The sacrifice is worthy of so great a monarch; it is fully merited by M. de Bragelonne,

who has already rendered great service to your Majesty, and who may well be regarded as a brave and worthy man. Your Majesty, therefore, in renouncing the affection you entertain, offers a proof at once of generosity, gratitude, and good policy."

"Mademoiselle de la Vallière does not love M. de Bragelonne," said the king, hoarsely.

"Does your Majesty know that to be the case?" remarked Athos; with a searching look.

"I do know it."

"Within a short time, then; for doubtless had your Majesty known it when I first preferred my request, you would have taken the trouble to inform me of it."

"Within a short time."

Athos remained silent for a moment, and then resumed: "In that case I do not understand why your Majesty should have sent M. de Bragelonne to London. That exile, and with good reason, is a matter of astonishment to all who love the honor of the king."

"Who presumes to speak of my honor, M. de la Fère?"

"The king's honor, Sire, is made up of the honor of his whole nobility. Whenever the king offends one of his gentlemen, — that is, whenever he deprives him of the smallest particle of his honor, — it is from him, from the king himself, that that portion of honor is stolen."

"M. de la Fère!" said the king, haughtily.

"Sire, you sent M. de Bragelonne to London either before you were Mademoiselle de la Vallière's lover or since you have become so."

The king, irritated beyond measure, especially because he felt that he was mastered, endeavored to dismiss Athos by a gesture.

"Sire," replied the count, "I will tell you all; I will not leave your presence until I have been satisfied either

by your Majesty or by myself, — satisfied if you prove to me that you are right, satisfied if I prove to you that you are wrong. Oh, you will listen to me, Sire ! I am old now, and I am attached to everything that is really great and true in your kingdom. I am a gentleman who shed my blood for your father and for yourself, without ever having asked a single favor either from yourself or from your father. I have never inflicted the slightest wrong or injury on any one in this world, and have put kings under obligations to me. You will listen to me. I have come to ask you for an account of the honor of one of your servants whom you have deceived by a falsehood or betrayed through weakness. I know that these words irritate your Majesty ; but on the other hand, the facts are killing us. I know you are inquiring what penalty you will inflict for my frankness ; but I know what punishment I will implore God to inflict upon you when I set before him your perjury and my son's unhappiness."

The king during these remarks was walking hurriedly to and fro, his hand thrust into the breast of his coat, his head haughtily raised, his eyes blazing with wrath. "Monsieur," he cried suddenly, "if I acted towards you as the king, you would be already punished ; but I am only a man, and I have the right to love in this world every one who loves me, — a happiness which is so rarely found."

"You cannot pretend to such a right as a man any more than as a king, Sire ; or if you intended to exercise that right in a loyal manner, you should have told M. de Bragelonne so, and not have exiled him."

"I think I am condescending to dispute with you, Monsieur !" interrupted Louis XIV., with that majesty of air and manner which he alone was able to give to his look and his voice.



"I was hoping that you would reply to me," said the count.

"You shall know my reply, Monsieur, very soon."

"You already know my thoughts on the subject," was the Comte de la Fère's answer.

"You have forgotten you are speaking to the king, Monsieur. It is a crime."

"You have forgotten you are destroying the lives of two men, Sire. It is a mortal sin."

"Go! — at once!"

"Not until I have said to you: Son of Louis XIII., you begin your reign badly, for you begin it by abduction and disloyalty! My race — myself, too — are now freed from all that affection and respect towards you to which I bound my son by oath in the vaults of St. Denis, in the presence of the relics of your noble forefathers. You are now become our enemy, Sire; and henceforth we have nothing to do save with Heaven alone, our sole master. Be warned!"

"Do you threaten?"

"Oh, no!" said Athos, sadly; "I have as little bravado as fear in my soul. The God of whom I spoke to you is now listening to me. He knows that for the safety and honor of your crown I would even yet shed every drop of blood which twenty years of civil and foreign warfare have left in my veins. I can well say, then, that I threaten the king as little as I threaten the man; but I tell you, Sire, you lose two servants, — for you have destroyed faith in the heart of the father, and love in the heart of the son: the one ceases to believe in the royal word, the other no longer believes in the loyalty of man or the purity of woman; the one is dead to every feeling of respect, the other to obedience. Adieu!"

Thus saying, Athos broke his sword across his knee,

slowly placed the two pieces upon the floor, and saluting the king, who was almost choking from rage and shame, quitted the cabinet.

Louis, who sat near the table, completely overwhelmed, spent several minutes in recovering himself, then suddenly rose and rang the bell violently. "Tell M. d'Artagnan to come here," he said to the terrified ushers.

## CHAPTER XIX.

## AFTER THE STORM.

OUR readers will doubtless have been asking themselves how it happened that Athos, of whom not a word has been said for some time past, arrived so very opportunely at court. Our claim, as narrator, being that we unfold events in exact logical sequence, we hold ourselves ready to answer that question.

Porthos, faithful to his duty as an arranger of affairs, had immediately after leaving the Palais-Royal set off to join Raoul at the Minimes in the Bois de Vincennes, and had related everything, even to the smallest details, which had passed between De Saint-Aignan and himself. He finished by saying that the message which the king had sent to his favorite would not probably occasion more than a short delay, and that De Saint-Aignan, as soon as he could leave the king, would not lose a moment in accepting the invitation which Raoul had sent him.

But Raoul, less credulous than his old friend, had concluded, from Porthos's recital, that if De Saint-Aignan was going to the king, De Saint-Aignan would tell the king everything, and that the king would therefore forbid De Saint-Aignan to obey the summons he had received to the hostile meeting. The consequence of his reflections was that he had left Porthos to remain at the place appointed for the meeting, in the very improbable case that De Saint-Aignan would come there; and had urged Porthos not to remain there more than an hour or an hour and a half. Porthos, however, formally refused to

assent to that, but on the contrary installed himself in the Minimes as if he were going to take root there, making Raoul promise that when he had been to see his father, he would return to his own apartments, in order that Porthos's servant might know where to find him in case M. de Saint-Aignan should happen to come to the rendezvous.

Bragelonne had left Vincennes, and had proceeded at once straight to the apartments of Athos, who had been in Paris during the last two days, and had been already informed of what had taken place by a letter from D'Artagnan. Raoul arrived at his father's.

Athos, after having held out his hand to him, and embraced him most affectionately, made a sign for him to sit down. "I know you come to me as a man would go to a friend, Viscount, whenever he is suffering; tell me, therefore, what it is that brings you now."

The young man bowed, and began his recital; more than once in the course of it his tears choked his utterance, and a sob checked in his throat compelled him to pause in his narration. However, he finished at last. Athos most probably already knew how matters stood, as we have just now said that D'Artagnan had already written to him; but preserving until the conclusion that calm, unruffled composure of manner which constituted the almost superhuman side of his character, he replied: "Raoul, I do not believe there is a word of truth in the rumors; I do not believe in the existence of what you fear, although I do not deny that persons most entitled to the fullest credit have already conversed with me on the subject. In my heart and soul I think it impossible that the king could be guilty of such an outrage upon a gentleman. I will answer for the king, therefore, and will soon bring you back the proof of what I say."

Raoul, wavering like a drunken man between what he

had seen with his own eyes and the imperturbable faith he had in a man who had never told a falsehood, bowed, and simply answered, "Go, then, Monsieur the Count ; I will await your return ;" and he sat down, burying his face in his hands.

Athos dressed, and then left him in order to wait upon the king ; what occurred in the interview with the king is already known to our readers.

When he returned to his lodgings, Raoul, pale and dejected, had not quitted his attitude of despair. At the sound, however, of the opening doors and of his father's footsteps, as he approached him, the young man raised his head. Athos's face was very pale, his head uncovered, and his manner full of seriousness ; he gave his cloak and hat to the lackey, dismissed him with a gesture, and sat down near Raoul.

"Well, Monsieur," inquired the young man, "are you quite convinced now ?"

"I am, Raoul ; the king loves Mademoiselle de la Vallière."

"He confesses it, then ?" cried Raoul.

"Yes," replied Athos.

"And she ?"

"I have not seen her."

"No ; but the king spoke to you about her. What did he say ?"

"He says that she loves him."

"Oh, you see, — you see, Monsieur !" said the young man, with a gesture of despair.

"Raoul," resumed the count, "I told the king, believe me, all that you yourself could possibly have said ; and I believe I did so in becoming language, though sufficiently firm."

"And what did you say to him, Monsieur ?"

"I told him, Raoul, that everything was now at an end between him and ourselves; that you would never serve him again. I told him that I, too, should remain aloof. Nothing further remains for me, then, but to be satisfied of one thing."

"What is that, Monsieur?"

"Whether you have determined to adopt any steps."

"Any steps? Regarding what?"

"With reference to your disappointed affection and —"

"Finish, Monsieur!"

"And with reference to revenge; for I fear that you think of avenging your wrongs."

"Oh, Monsieur, with regard to my affection, I shall perhaps, some day or other, succeed in tearing it from my heart; I trust I shall do so, aided by Heaven's merciful help and your wise exhortations. So far as vengeance is concerned, it occurred to me only when under the influence of an evil thought, for I could not revenge myself upon the one who is actually guilty; I have therefore already renounced every idea of revenge."

"And so you no longer think of seeking a quarrel with M. de Saint-Aignan?"

"No, Monsieur. I sent him a challenge. If he accepts it, I will maintain it; if he does not take it up, I will leave it where it is."

"And La Vallière?"

"You cannot, I know, have seriously thought that I should dream of revenging myself upon a woman?" replied Raoul, with a smile so sad that a tear started even to the eyes of his father, who had so many times in the course of his life been bowed beneath his own sorrows and those of others.

Athos held out his hand to Raoul, which the latter seized most eagerly.



"And so, Monsieur the Count, you are quite satisfied that the misfortune is without a remedy?" inquired the young man.

Athos shook his head. "Poor boy!" he murmured.

"You think that I still hope," said Raoul, "and you pity me. Oh, it is indeed a horrible suffering for me to despise, as I ought to do, her whom I have loved so devotedly. If I but had some real cause of complaint against her, I should be happy, and should be able to forgive her."

Athos looked at his son with a sorrowful air. The few words which Raoul had just pronounced seemed to have issued out of his own heart. At this moment the servant announced M. d'Artagnan. This name sounded very differently to the ears of Athos and of Raoul.

The musketeer entered the room with a vague smile upon his lips. Raoul paused. Athos walked towards his friend with an expression of face which did not escape Bragelonne. D'Artagnan answered Athos's look by a simple movement of the eyelid; and then, advancing towards Raoul, whom he took by the hand, he said, addressing both father and son, "Well, you are trying to console the boy, it seems."

"And you, kind and good as usual, are come to help me in my difficult task."

As he said this, Athos pressed D'Artagnan's hand between both his own. Raoul fancied he observed in this pressure something beyond the sense his mere words conveyed.

"Yes," replied the musketeer, smoothing his mustache with the hand that Athos had left free, — "yes, I have come also."

"You are most welcome, Chevalier; not for the consolation you bring with you, but on your own account. I am already consoled," said Raoul; and he attempted to

smile, but the effect was far more sad than any tears D'Artagnan had ever seen shed.

"That is all well and good, then," said D'Artagnan.

"Only," continued Raoul, "you have arrived just as the count was about to give me the details of his interview with the king. You will allow the count to continue?" added the young man, as with his eyes fixed on the musketeer he seemed to search the depths of his heart.

"His interview with the king?" said D'Artagnan, in a tone so natural and unassumed that there was no reason to doubt his astonishment. "You have seen the king then, Athos?"

Athos smiled as he said, "Yes, I have seen him."

"Ah, indeed! you were ignorant, then, that the count had seen his Majesty?" inquired Raoul, half reassured.

"My faith, yes! entirely."

"In that case I am less uneasy," said Raoul.

"Uneasy — and about what?" inquired Athos.

"Forgive me, Monsieur," said Raoul; "but knowing so well the regard and affection you have for me, I was afraid you might possibly have expressed somewhat plainly to his Majesty my own sufferings and your indignation, and that the king had consequently —"

"And that the king had consequently —" repeated D'Artagnan; "well, go on, finish what you were going to say."

"I have now to ask you to forgive me, M. d'Artagnan," said Raoul. "For a moment, and I cannot help confessing it, I trembled lest you had come here, not as M. d'Artagnan, but as captain of the Musketeers."

"You are mad, my poor boy," cried D'Artagnan, with a burst of laughter in which an exact observer might perhaps have desired a little more frankness.

"So much the better," said Raoul.

"Yes, mad ; and do you know what I would advise you to do ?"

"Tell me, Monsieur ; for the advice is sure to be good, as it comes from you."

"Very well, then. I advise you, after your long journey from England, after your visit to M. de Guiche, after your visit to Madame, after your visit to Porthos, after your journey to Vincennes, — I advise you, I say, to take a few hours' rest ; go and lie down, sleep for a dozen hours, and when you wake up, go and ride one of my horses until you have tired him to death." And drawing Raoul towards him, D'Artagnan embraced him as if he were his own child. Athos did the like ; only, it was very apparent that the father's kiss was more tender and his embrace closer than those of the friend.

The young man again looked at his companions, endeavoring with the utmost strength of his intelligence to read what was in their minds ; but his look was powerless upon the smiling countenance of the musketeer or upon the calm and composed features of the Comte de la Fère.

"Where are you going, Raoul ?" inquired the latter, seeing that Bragelonne was preparing to go out.

"To my own apartments," replied Raoul, in his soft and sad voice.

"We shall be sure to find you there, then, if we should have anything to say to you ?"

"Yes, Monsieur ; but do you suppose it likely you will have something to say to me ?"

"How can I tell ?" said Athos.

"Yes, new consolations," said D'Artagnan, pushing him gently towards the door.

Raoul, observing the perfect composure which marked every gesture of his two friends, quitted the count's room, carrying away with him nothing but the individual feeling

of his own particular distress. "Thank Heaven!" he said; "since that is the case, I need only think of myself." And wrapping himself in his cloak, in order to conceal from the passers-by in the streets his gloomy face, he started out to return to his own rooms, as he had promised Porthos.

The two friends watched the young man as he walked away with a feeling akin to pity; only, each expressed it in a very different way.

"Poor Raoul!" said Athos, sighing deeply.

"Poor Raoul!" said D'Artagnan, shrugging his shoulders.

## CHAPTER XX.

HEU ! MISER !

“Poor Raoul !” Athos had said ; “Poor Raoul !” D’Artagnan had said : to be pitied by both these men, Raoul must indeed have been most unhappy. And when he found himself alone, face to face as it were with his own troubles, leaving behind him the intrepid friend and the indulgent father ; when he recalled the avowal of the king’s affection, which had robbed him of Louise de la Vallière, whom he loved so deeply, — he felt his heart almost breaking ; as indeed we all have at least once in our lives, at the first illusion destroyed, at the first love betrayed. “Oh,” he murmured, “all is over then ! Nothing is now left me in this world, — nothing to look for, nothing to hope for ! Guiche has told me so ; my father has told me so, and M. d’Artagnan likewise. Everything is a mere idle dream in this life. That future which I have been hopelessly pursuing for the last ten years, a dream ! that union of our hearts, a dream ! that life formed of love and happiness, a dream ! Poor fool, to publish my dreams in the face of my friends and my enemies, — that my friends may be saddened by my troubles and my enemies may laugh at my sorrows ! So my unhappiness will soon become a notorious disgrace, a public scandal ; so to-morrow I shall be ignominiously pointed at.”

Despite the composure which he had promised his father and D’Artagnan to observe, Raoul could not resist uttering a few words of dark menace. “And yet,” he

continued, "if my name were De Wardes, and if I had the pliant character and strength of will of M. d'Artagnan, I should laugh, with my lips at least ; I should convince other women that this perfidious girl, honored by my love, leaves me only one regret, — that of having been deceived by her counterfeit of honesty. Some men might perhaps make favor with the king at my expense : I should put myself on the track of those jesters ; I should chastise a few of them, — the men would fear me, and by the time I had laid three at my feet I should be adored by the women. Yes, yes ; that indeed would be the proper course to adopt, and the Comte de la Fère himself would not object to it. Has not he also been tried, in his earlier days, in the same manner as I have just been tried myself ? Did he not replace love by intoxication ? He has often told me so. Why should not I replace love by pleasure ? He must have suffered as much as I suffer, — even more so, perhaps. The history of one man is the history of all men, — a lengthened trial, of greater or less duration, more or less bitter or sorrowful. The voice of human nature is nothing but one prolonged cry. But what are the sufferings of others compared to those from which I am now suffering ? Does the open wound in another's breast soften the pain of the gaping wound in our own ? Or does the blood which is welling from another man's side stanch that which is pouring from our own ? Does the general anguish of our fellow-creatures lessen our own private and particular anguish ? No, no ; each suffers on his own account, each struggles with his own grief, each sheds his own tears. And besides, what has my life been up to the present moment ? A cold, barren, sterile arena, in which I have always fought for others, never for myself, — sometimes for a king, sometimes for a woman. The king has betrayed me ; the woman disdained me. Miserable, un-



happy wretch that I am ! Women ! Can I not make all expiate the crime of one of their sex ? What does that require ? To have a heart no longer, or to forget that I ever had one ; to be strong, even against weakness itself ; to lean always, even when one feels that the support is giving way. What is needed to attain that result ? To be young, handsome, strong, valiant, rich. I am, or shall be, all that. But, honor ? What is honor, after all ? A theory which every man understands in his own way. My father tells me : ‘ Honor is the consideration of what is due to others, and particularly of what one owes to one’s self.’ But De Guiche and Manicamp, and De Saint-Aignan particularly, would say to me, ‘ Honor consists in serving the passions and pleasures of one’s king.’ Honor such as that, indeed, is easy and productive enough. With honor like that I can keep my post at the court, become a gentleman of the chamber, and have the command of a regiment. With honor such as that, I can be both duke and peer.

“ The stain which that woman has just stamped upon me, the grief with which she has just broken my heart, — mine, Raoul’s, her friend from childhood, — in no way affect M. de Bragelonne, an excellent officer, a courageous leader, who will cover himself with glory at the first encounter, and who will become a hundred times greater than Made-moiselle de la Vallière is to-day, the mistress of the king ; for the king will not marry her, — and the more publicly he proclaims her as his mistress, the more will he enlarge the band of shame which he places as a crown upon her brow ; and when others shall despise her as I despise her, I shall have become famous. Alas ! we had walked together side by side, she and I, during the earliest, the brightest, and best portion of our existence, hand in hand along the charming path of life, covered with the flowers

of youth ; and now we come to a cross road, where she separates herself from me, whence we shall follow different roads, which will lead us always farther apart. And to attain the end of this path, oh, Heaven ! I am alone, I am in despair, I am crushed. Oh, unhappy man that I am ! ”

Such were the sinister reflections in which Raoul was indulging when his foot mechanically paused at the door of his own dwelling. He had reached it without noticing the streets through which he had passed, without knowing how he had come ; he pushed open the door, continued to advance, and ascended the staircase. The staircase, as in most of the houses at that period, was very dark, and the landings were obscure. Raoul lived on the first floor ; he paused in order to ring. Olivain appeared, and took Raoul's sword and cloak from his hands. Raoul himself opened the door which from the antechamber led into a small salon, richly furnished enough for the salon of a young man, and completely filled with flowers by Olivain, who knowing his master's tastes had shown himself studiously attentive in gratifying them without caring whether his master perceived his attention or not. There was a portrait of La Vallière in the salon, which had been drawn by herself and given by her to Raoul. This portrait, fastened above a large easy-chair covered with dark-colored damask, was the first point towards which Raoul bent his steps, the first object on which he fixed his eyes. It was, moreover, Raoul's usual habit to do so ; every time he entered his room, this portrait, before anything else, attracted his attention. This time, as usual, he walked straight up to the portrait, placed his knees upon the arm-chair, and paused to look at it sadly. His arms were crossed upon his breast, his head slightly thrown back, his eyes filled with tears, his lips curved in a bitter smile.

He looked at the portrait of her whom he so tenderly loved ; and then all that he had said passed before his mind again, and all that he had suffered assailed his heart. After a long silence he murmured for the third time, " Miserable, unhappy wretch that I, am ! "

He had hardly pronounced these words, when he heard the sound of a sigh and a groan behind him. He turned sharply round, and perceived in the angle of the salon, standing up, a bending veiled female figure, which the opening door had concealed as he entered, and which, since he had not turned around, he had not perceived. He advanced towards this figure, whose presence in his room had not been announced to him ; and as he bowed, and inquired at the same moment who she was, she suddenly raised her head, and removed the veil from her face, revealing her pale and sorrow-stricken features.

Raoul staggered back, as if he had seen a ghost. " Louise ! " he cried, in a tone of such despair as one could hardly believe the human voice could express without breaking all the fibres of the heart.

## CHAPTER XXI.

## WOUNDS UPON WOUNDS.

MADemoisELLE DE LA VALLIÈRE (for it was indeed she) advanced a few steps towards him. "Yes — Louise," she murmured.

But this interval, short as it had been, was quite sufficient for Raoul to recover himself. "You, Mademoiselle?" he said; and then added, in an indefinable tone, "You here!"

"Yes, Raoul," the young girl replied; "I have been waiting for you."

"I beg your pardon. When I came into the room I was not aware —"

"I know — but I entreated Olivain not to tell you —"

Louise hesitated; and as Raoul did not attempt to interrupt her, a moment's silence ensued, during which the sound of their throbbing hearts might have been heard, no longer in unison with each other, but the one beating as violently as the other. It was for Louise to speak, and she made an effort to do so. "I wished to speak to you," she said. "It was absolutely necessary that I should see you — myself — alone. I have not hesitated to adopt a step which must remain secret; for no one, except yourself, could understand my motive, M. de Bragelonne."

"In fact, Mademoiselle," Raoul stammered out, almost breathless from emotion, "so far as I am concerned, and despite the good opinion you have of me, I confess —"

"Will you do me the great kindness to sit down and listen to me?" said Louise, interrupting him with her soft, sweet voice.

Bragelonne looked at her for a moment; then, mournfully shaking his head, he sat, or rather fell down, on a chair. "Speak!" he said.

Louise cast a glance all round her. This look was a timid entreaty, and implored secrecy far more effectually than her expressed words had done a few minutes before.

Raoul rose, and went to the door, which he opened. "Olivain," he said, "I am not within for any one;" and then, turning towards Louise, he added, "Is not that what you wished?"

Nothing could have produced a greater effect upon Louise than these few words which seemed to signify, "You see that I still understand you." She passed a handkerchief across her eyes, in order to remove a rebellious tear; and then, having collected herself for a moment, she said: "Raoul, do not turn your kind, frank look away from me! You are not one of those men who despise a woman for having given her heart to another, even though that love might render him unhappy or might wound his pride."

Raoul did not reply.

"Alas!" continued La Vallière, "it is only too true. My cause is a bad one, and I know not in what way to begin. It will be better for me, I think, to relate to you very simply everything that has befallen me. As I shall speak the truth, I shall always find my path clear before me in the obscurity, hesitation, and obstacles which I have to brave in order to solace my heart, which is full to overflowing, and wishes to pour itself out at your feet."

Raoul continued to preserve the same unbroken silence.

La Vallière looked at him with an air that seemed to say, "Encourage me ; for pity's sake, but a single word !" But Raoul did not open his lips ; and the young girl was obliged to continue.

"Just now," she said, "M. de Saint-Aignan came to me by the king's directions." She cast down her eyes as she said this ; while Raoul, on his side, turned his away, in order to avoid looking at her. "M. de Saint-Aignan came to me from the king," she repeated, "and told me that you knew all ;" and she attempted to look Raoul in the face, after inflicting this further wound upon him in addition to the many others he had already received ; but it was impossible to meet Raoul's eyes.

"He told me you were incensed with me, — justly so, I admit."

This time Raoul looked at the young girl, and a smile full of disdain passed across his lips.

"Oh," she continued, "I entreat you, do not say that you have had any other feeling against me than that of anger merely ! Raoul, wait until I have told you all, — wait until I have said to you all that I had to say, all that I came to say !"

Raoul, by the strength of his own iron will, forced his features to assume a calmer expression ; and the disdainful smile upon his lip passed away.

"In the first place," said La Vallière, — "in the first place, with my hands raised in entreaty towards you, with my forehead bowed to the ground before you, I entreat you, as the most generous, as the noblest of men, to pardon, to forgive me. If I have left you in ignorance of what was passing in my own bosom, never, at least, would I have consented to deceive you. Oh, I entreat you, Raoul, — I implore you on my knees, — answer me one word, even though you wrong me in doing so ! Better



an injurious word from your lips than a suspicion in your heart ! ”

“ I admire your subtlety of expression, Mademoiselle,” said Raoul, making an effort to remain calm. “ To leave another in ignorance that you are deceiving him is loyal ; but to deceive him — it seems that that would be very wrong, and that you would not do it.”

“ Monsieur, for a long time I thought that I loved you better than anything else ; and so long as I believed in my love for you, I told you that I loved you. At Blois I loved you. The king visited Blois ; I believed I loved you still. I could have sworn it on the altar ; but a day came when I was undeceived.”

“ Well, on that day, Mademoiselle, knowing that I still continued to love you, true loyalty of conduct ought to have obliged you to tell me you had ceased to love me.”

“ But on that day, Raoul, — on that day, when I read in the depths of my own heart, when I confessed to myself that you no longer filled my mind entirely, when I saw another future before me than that of being your friend, your life-long companion, your wife, — on that day, Raoul, you were not, alas ! any more beside me.”

“ But you knew where I was, Mademoiselle ; you could have written to me.”

“ Raoul, I did not dare to do so. Raoul, I have been weak and cowardly. I knew you so thoroughly — I knew how devotedly you loved me — that I trembled at the bare idea of the grief I was going to cause you ; and that is so true, Raoul, that at this very moment I am now speaking to you, bending thus before you, my heart crushed in my bosom, my voice full of sighs, my eyes full of tears, — it is so perfectly true, that I have no other defence than my frankness, I have no other sorrow greater than that which I read in your eyes.”

Raoul attempted to smile.

"No," said the young girl, with a profound conviction, "no, no; you will not do me so foul a wrong as to disguise your feelings before me now! You loved me, you were sure of your affection for me, you did not deceive yourself, you did not lie to your own heart; while I — I —" And pale as death, her arms thrown despairingly above her head, she fell upon her knees.

"While you," said Raoul, — "you told me you loved me, and yet you loved another."

"Alas, yes!" cried the poor girl, — "alas, yes! I do love another; and that other — oh, for Heaven's sake, let me say it, Raoul, for it is my only excuse — that other I love better than my own life, better than my own soul even. Forgive my fault or punish my treason, Raoul. I came here in no way to defend myself, but merely to say to you, 'You know what it is to love!' Well, I love! I love to that degree that I would give my life, my very soul, to the man I love. If he should ever cease to love me, I shall die of grief and despair, unless God helps me, unless the Lord shows pity upon me. Raoul, I came here to submit myself to your will, whatever it might be, — to die, if it were your wish I should die. Kill me, then, Raoul, if in your heart you believe I deserve death!"

"Take care, Mademoiselle!" said Raoul; "the woman who invites death is one who has nothing but her heart's blood to offer to her deceived and betrayed lover."

"You are right," she said.

Raoul uttered a deep sigh as he exclaimed, "And you love without being able to forget!"

"I love without a wish to forget, without a wish ever to love any one else," replied La Vallière.

"Very well," said Raoul. "You have said to me, in fact, all you had to say, all I could possibly wish to know."

And now, Mademoiselle, it is I who ask your forgiveness ; for it is I who have almost been an obstacle in your life. I, too, have been wrong ; for in deceiving myself I helped to deceive you."

"Oh," said La Vallière, "I do not ask you so much as that, Raoul !"

"I only am to blame, Mademoiselle," continued Raoul. "Better informed than yourself of the difficulties of this life, I should have enlightened you. I ought not to have relied upon uncertainty ; I ought to have extracted an answer from your heart, while I hardly even sought an acknowledgment from your lips. Once more, Mademoiselle, it is I who ask your forgiveness."

"Impossible, impossible !" she cried ; "you are mocking me."

"How, impossible ?"

"Yes, it is impossible to be good and excellent and perfect to such a degree as that."

"Take care !" said Raoul, with a bitter smile ; "for presently you may say perhaps that I did not love you."

"Oh, you love me like an affectionate brother ; let me hope that, Raoul."

"As a brother ! Undeceive yourself, Louise ! I loved you as a lover, as a husband, with the deepest, the truest, the fondest affection."

"Raoul, Raoul !"

"As a brother ! Oh, Louise ! I loved you so much that I would have given all my blood for you, drop by drop ; all my flesh, shred by shred ; all my eternity, hour by hour."

"Raoul ! Raoul ! for pity's sake !"

"I loved you so much, Louise, that my heart is dead, my faith is extinguished, my eyes have lost their light. I

loved you so much that I see nothing more either on earth or in heaven."

"Raoul, dear Raoul! spare me, I implore you!" cried La Vallière. "Oh, if I had known —"

"It is too late, Louise. You love, you are happy; I read your happiness through your tears, — behind the tears which the loyalty of your nature makes you shed; I feel the sighs which your love breathes forth. Louise, Louise, you have made me the most abjectly wretched man living; leave me, I entreat you! Adieu! adieu!"

"Forgive me, I entreat you!"

"Have I not done more? Have I not told you that I love you still?" She buried her face in her hands. "And to tell you that, — do you understand me, Louise? — to tell you that at such a moment as this, to tell you that as I have told you, is to pronounce my own sentence of death. Adieu!"

La Vallière wished to hold out her hands to him.

"We ought not to see each other again in this world," he said; and as she was on the point of calling out in bitter agony at this remark, he placed his hand on her mouth to stifle the exclamation. She pressed her lips upon it and fell fainting.

"Olivain," said Raoul, "take this young lady and bear her to the carriage which is waiting for her at the door."

As Olivain lifted her up, Raoul made a movement towards La Vallière, as if to give her a first and last kiss; but stopping abruptly, he said, "No, she is not mine; I am not the King of France, to steal!" And he returned to his room; while the lackey carried La Vallière, still fainting, to the carriage.

## CHAPTER XXII.

## WHAT RAOUL HAD GUESSED.

AFTER Raoul's departure, and the two exclamations which had followed him, Athos and D'Artagnan found themselves alone, face to face. Athos immediately resumed the earnest manner which had possessed him when D'Artagnan arrived.

"Well," Athos said, "what have you come to announce to me, my friend?"

"I?" inquired D'Artagnan.

"Yes; I do not see you in this way without some reason for it," said Athos, smiling.

"The deuce!" said D'Artagnan.

"I will place you at your ease. The king is furious, is he not?"

"Well, I must say he is not altogether pleased."

"And you have come —"

"By his direction; yes."

"To arrest me, then?"

"My dear friend, you have hit the very mark."

"Oh, I expected it! Come!"

"Oh! oh! The devil!" said D'Artagnan; "what a hurry you are in!"

"I am afraid of delaying you," said Athos, smiling.

"I have plenty of time. Are you not curious, besides, to know how things went on between the king and me?"

"If you will be good enough to tell me, I will listen with the greatest pleasure," said Athos, pointing out to

D'Artagnan a large chair, in which the latter stretched himself in an easy attitude.

"Well, I will do so willingly enough," continued D'Artagnan, "for the conversation is rather interesting. In the first place, the king sent for me."

"As soon as I had left?"

"You were just going down the last steps of the staircase, as the musketeers told me. I arrived. My dear Athos, the king was not red in the face merely, he was positively purple. I was not aware, of course, of what had passed; only I saw a sword broken in two lying on the floor. 'Captain d'Artagnan,' cried the king, as soon as he saw me. 'Sire,' I replied. 'I abandon M. de la Fère; he is an insolent man.' 'An insolent man!' I exclaimed, in such a tone that the king stopped suddenly short. 'Captain d'Artagnan,' resumed the king, with his teeth clinched, 'you will listen to me and obey me.' 'That is my duty, Sire.' 'I have wished to spare that gentleman, of whom I retain some kind recollections, the affront of having him arrested in my presence.' 'Ah! ah!' I said quietly. 'But you will take a carriage.' At this I made a slight movement. 'If you object to arrest him yourself,' continued the king, 'send me my captain of the Guards.' 'Sire,' I replied, 'there is no necessity for the captain of the Guards, since I am on duty.' 'I should not like to annoy you,' said the king, kindly, 'for you have always served me well, M. d'Artagnan.' 'You do not annoy me, Sire,' I replied; 'I am on duty, that is all.' 'But,' said the king, in astonishment, 'I believe the count is your friend?' 'If he were my father, Sire, it would not make me less on duty than I am.' The king looked at me; he saw how unmoved my face was, and seemed satisfied. 'You will arrest M. le Comte de la Fère, then?' he inquired. 'Most certainly, Sire, if you



give me the order to do so.' 'Very well; I order you to do so.' I bowed and replied, 'Where is the count, Sire?' 'You will look for him.' 'And I am to arrest him wherever he may be?' 'Yes; but at his own house if possible. If he has started for his own estate, leave Paris at once, and arrest him on his way thither.' I bowed; but as I did not move, he said, 'Well?' 'I am waiting, Sire.' 'What are you waiting for?' 'For the signed order.' The king seemed annoyed; for in point of fact it was the exercise of a fresh act of authority, — a repetition of the arbitrary act, if indeed it is to be considered as such. He took his pen slowly, and in no very good temper; then he wrote, 'Order for M. le Chevalier d'Artagnan, captain of my Musketeers, to arrest M. le Comte de la Fère, wherever he is to be found.' He then turned towards me; but I was looking on without moving a muscle of my face. In all probability he thought he perceived something like bravado in my tranquil manner, for he signed hurriedly; and then handing me the order, he said, 'Go!' I obeyed; and here I am."

Athos pressed his friend's hand. "Well, let us set off," he said.

"Oh! surely," said D'Artagnan, "you must have some trifling matters to arrange before you leave your apartments in this manner?"

"I? Not at all."

"Why not?"

"Why, you know, D'Artagnan, I have always been a very simple traveller on this earth, ready to go to the end of the world by the order of my sovereign, ready to quit it at the summons of my Maker. What does a man who is thus prepared require in such a case? — a portmanteau or a shroud. I am ready at this moment, as I have always been, dear friend, and can accompany you at once."

“But Bragelonne — ”

“I have brought him up in the same principles I laid down for my own guidance ; and you observed that as soon as he perceived you he guessed, that very moment, the motive of your visit. We have thrown him off his guard for a moment ; but do not be uneasy, — he is sufficiently prepared for my disgrace not to be too much alarmed at it. So, let us go.”

“Very well, let us go,” said D’Artagnan, quietly.

“As I broke my sword in the king’s presence, and threw the pieces at his feet, I presume that will dispense with the necessity of delivering it over to you.”

“You are quite right ; and besides that, what the devil do you suppose I could do with your sword ? ”

“Am I to walk behind or before you ? ” inquired Athos, laughing.

“You will walk arm-in-arm with me,” replied D’Artagnan, as he took the count’s arm to descend the staircase ; and in this manner they arrived at the landing. Grimaud, whom they had met in the anteroom, looked at them, as they went out together in this manner, with some little uneasiness ; his experience of affairs was quite sufficient to give him good reason to suspect that there was something wrong.

“Ah ! is that you, Grimaud ? ” said Athos, kindly. “We are going — ”

“To take a turn in my carriage,” interrupted D’Artagnan, with a friendly nod of the head.

Grimaud thanked D’Artagnan by a grimace, which was evidently intended for a smile, and accompanied the two friends to the door. Athos entered first into the carriage ; D’Artagnan followed him, without saying a word to the coachman. The departure had taken place so quietly that it excited no disturbance or attention even in the neigh-

borhood. When the carriage had reached the quays, "You are taking me to the Bastille, I perceive," said Athos.

"I?" said D'Artagnan. "I take you wherever you may choose to go; nowhere else, I can assure you."

"What do you mean?" said the count, surprised.

"*Pardieu!*" said D'Artagnan, "you quite understand that I undertook the mission with no other object in view than that of carrying it out exactly as you liked. You did not think that I would have you thrown into prison like that, brutally, without reflection. If I had anticipated that, I should have let the captain of the Guards undertake it."

"And so —" said Athos.

"And so, I repeat, we will go wherever you may choose."

"My dear friend," said Athos, embracing D'Artagnan, "how like you that is!"

"Well, it seems simple enough to me. The coachman will take you to the barrier of the Cours-la-Reine; you will find a horse there which I have ordered to be kept ready for you; with that horse you will be able to do three posts without stopping; and I, on my side, will take care not to return to the king, to tell him that you have gone away, until it will be impossible to overtake you. In the mean time you will have reached Havre, and from Havre you will go to England, where you will find the charming residence which my friend M. Monk gave me, — to say nothing of the hospitality which King Charles will not fail to show you. Well, what do you think of this project?"

"Take me to the Bastille," said Athos, smiling.

"You are an obstinate-headed fellow, dear Athos," returned D'Artagnan; "reflect for a few moments."

“Upon what?”

“That you are no longer twenty years of age. Believe me, — I speak according to my own knowledge and experience, — a prison is certain death for men of our time of life. No, no; I will never allow you to languish in prison. Why, the very thought of it turns my head.”

“Dear D’Artagnan,” Athos replied, “happily God made me as strong in body as in mind; and rely upon it, I shall retain my strength up to the very last moment.”

“But this is not force; it is folly.”

“No, D’Artagnan, it is the highest order of reasoning. Do not suppose that I should in the slightest degree in the world discuss the question with you, whether you would not be ruined in endeavoring to save me. I should have done precisely as you have arranged, if flight had seemed proper to me; I should therefore have accepted from you what without any doubt you would have accepted from me. No! I know you too well even to breathe a word upon the subject.”

“Ah, if you would only let me do it,” said D’Artagnan, “how I would send the king running after you!”

“He is the king, dear friend.”

“Oh, that is all the same to me; and king though he be, I would plainly tell him, ‘Sire! imprison, exile, kill every one in France and Europe; order me to arrest, and even poniard whom you like, — even were it Monsieur, your own brother; but do not touch one of the four musketeers, or, if so, *mordious!*’”

“My dear friend,” replied Athos, quietly, “I should like to persuade you of one thing; namely, that I wish to be arrested, — that I desire above all things that my arrest should take place.” D’Artagnan made a movement of his shoulders. “What does that mean? It is so. If you were to let me escape, it would be only to return of my

own accord, and constitute myself a prisoner. I wish to prove to this young man, who is dazzled by the power and splendor of his crown, that he can be regarded as the first among men only by proving himself to be the most generous and the wisest among them. He may punish, imprison, or torture me, — it matters not. He abuses his opportunities, and I wish him to learn the bitterness of remorse, while Heaven teaches him what a chastisement is."

"Well, well," replied D'Artagnan, "I know only too well that when you have once said 'No,' you mean 'No.' I do not insist any longer. You wish to go to the Bastille?"

"I do wish to go there."

"Let us go, then! To the Bastille!" cried D'Artagnan to the coachman; and throwing himself back in the carriage, he gnawed the ends of his mustache with a fury which to Athos, who knew him well, signified a resolution either already taken or in course of formation. A profound silence ensued in the carriage, which continued to roll on, but neither faster nor slower than before.

Athos took the musketeer by the hand. "You are not angry with me, D'Artagnan?" he said.

"I? Oh, no! certainly not, of course not! What you do from heroism, I should have done from sheer obstinacy."

"But you are quite of opinion, are you not, that Heaven will avenge me, D'Artagnan?"

"And I know some persons on earth who will lend a helping hand," said the captain.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

THREE GUESTS ASTONISHED TO FIND THEMSELVES AT  
SUPPER TOGETHER.

THE carriage arrived at the outside gate of the Bastille. A soldier on guard stopped it ; but D'Artagnan had only to utter a single word to procure admittance, and the carriage passed on. While they were proceeding along the covered way which led to the courtyard of the governor's residence, D'Artagnan, whose lynx eye saw everything, even through the walls, suddenly cried out, "What is that out yonder?"

"Well," said Athos, quietly, "what is it?"

"Look yonder, Athos!"

"In the courtyard?"

"Yes, yes ; make haste!"

"Well, a carriage ; very likely conveying a prisoner like myself."

"That would be too droll."

"I do not understand you."

"Make haste and look again, and look at the man who is just getting out of that carriage."

At that very moment a second sentinel stopped D'Artagnan ; and while the formalities were gone through, Athos could see at a hundred paces from him the man whom his friend had pointed out to him. He was, in fact, getting out of the carriage at the door of the governor's house. "Well," inquired D'Artagnan, "do you see him?"



"Yes ; he is a man in a gray suit."

"What do you say of him ?"

"I cannot very well tell. He is, as I have just now told you, a man in a gray suit, who is getting out of a carriage ; that is all."

"Athos, I will wager anything it is he."

"He ? — who ?"

"Aramis."

"Aramis arrested ? Impossible !"

"I do not say he is arrested, since we see him alone in his carriage."

"Well, then, what is he doing here ?"

"Oh, he knows Baisemeaux, the governor !" replied the musketeer, slyly. "My faith ! we have arrived just in time."

"What for ?"

"In order to see what we can see."

"I regret this meeting exceedingly. When Aramis sees me, he will be very much annoyed, — in the first place at seeing me, and in the next at being seen."

"Very well reasoned."

"Unfortunately, there is no remedy for it. Whenever any one meets another in the Bastille, even if he wished to draw back to avoid him, it would be impossible."

"Athos, I have an idea : the question is, to spare Aramis the annoyance you were speaking of, is it not ?"

"What is to be done ?"

"I will tell you ; or, in order better to explain myself, let me relate the affair in my own manner. I will not recommend you to tell a falsehood, for that would be impossible for you to do."

"Well, what is it ?"

"Well, I will lie for both of us ; it is so easy to do that, with the nature and habits of a Gascon."

Athos smiled. The carriage stopped where the one we have just now pointed out had stopped ; namely, at the door of the governor's house.

"It is understood, then?" said D'Artagnan, in a low voice to his friend.

Athos consented by a gesture.

They ascended the staircase. There will be no occasion for surprise at the facility with which they had entered into the Bastille, if it be remembered that before passing the first gate — in fact, the most difficult of all — D'Artagnan had announced that he had brought a prisoner of State. At the third gate, on the contrary, — that is to say, when he had once fairly entered the prison, — he merely said to the sentinel, "To M. Baisemeaux;" and they both passed on. In a few minutes they were in the governor's dining-room; and the first face which attracted D'Artagnan's observation was that of Aramis, who was seated side by side with Baisemeaux, and awaited the announcement of a good meal, whose odor impregnated the whole apartment. If D'Artagnan pretended surprise, Aramis did not pretend at all; he started when he saw his two friends, and his emotion was very apparent. Athos and D'Artagnan, however, made their salutations; and Baisemeaux, amazed, completely stupefied by the presence of those three guests, began to perform a few evolutions around them.

"Ah, there!" said Aramis, "by what chance —"

"We were just going to ask you," retorted D'Artagnan.

"Are we going to give ourselves up as prisoners?" cried Aramis, with an affectation of hilarity.

"Ah! ah!" said D'Artagnan; "it is true the walls smell deucedly like a prison. M. de Baisemeaux, you know you invited me to sup with you the other day."

"I?" cried Baisemeaux.

“Ah! one would say you had fallen from the clouds. You have no recollection of it?”

Baisemeaux turned pale and then red; looked at Aramis, who looked at him; and finally stammered, “Certainly — I am delighted — but — upon my honor — I have not the slightest — Ah! I have such a wretched memory.”

“Well, I am wrong, I see,” said D’Artagnan, as if he were offended.

“Wrong, how?”

“Wrong to remember, it seems.”

Baisemeaux hurried towards him. “Do not stand on ceremony, my dear captain,” he said. “I have the poorest head in the kingdom. Take me from my pigeons and their pigeon-house, and I am no better than the rawest recruit.”

“At all events, you remember it now,” said D’Artagnan, boldly.

“Yes, yes,” replied the governor, hesitating; “I think I remember.”

“It was when you came to the palace to see me; you told me some story or other about your accounts with M. de Louvière and M. de Tremblay.”

“Oh, yes! perfectly.”

“And about M. d’Herblay’s kindness to you.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Aramis, looking the unhappy governor full in the face; “and yet you just now said you had no memory, M. de Baisemeaux.”

Baisemeaux interrupted the musketeer in the midst of his revelations. “Yes, yes, you’re quite right; it seems to me that I am still there. I beg a thousand pardons. But now, once for all, my dear M. d’Artagnan, be sure that at this present time, as at any other, whether invited or not, you are master here, — you and M. d’Herblay,

your friend," he said, turning towards Aramis; "and this gentleman too," he added, bowing to Athos.

"Well, I thought it would be sure to turn out so," replied D'Artagnan. "This is the occasion of my coming: Having nothing to do this evening at the Palais-Royal, I wished to judge for myself what your ordinary style of living was like; and as I was coming along I met Monsieur the Count." Athos bowed. "The count, who had just left his Majesty, handed me an order which required immediate attention. We were close by here; I wished to call in, even if it were for no other object than that of shaking hands with you and of presenting the count to you, of whom you spoke so highly in the king's presence that very evening when —"

"Certainly, certainly — M. le Comte de la Fère, is it not?"

"Precisely."

"Monsieur the Count is welcome."

"And he will sup with you two, I suppose; while I, unfortunate dog that I am, must run off on a matter of duty. Oh, what happy beings you are, compared to myself!" D'Artagnan added, sighing as loud as Porthos might have done.

"And so you are going away?" said Aramis and Baisemeaux together, with the same expression of delighted surprise, the tone of which was immediately noticed by D'Artagnan.

"I leave you in my place," he said, "a noble and excellent guest;" and he touched Athos gently on the shoulder, who, astonished also, could not help exhibiting his surprise a little, — which was noticed by Aramis only, for M. de Baisemeaux was not quite equal to the three friends in point of intelligence.

"What! are you going to leave us?" resumed the governor.

"I shall be away only about an hour or an hour and a half. I will return in time for dessert."

"Oh, we will wait for you!" said Baisemeaux.

"No, no; that would be really disobliging me."

"You will be sure to return, though?" said Athos, with an expression of doubt.

"Most certainly," he said, pressing his friend's hand confidentially; and he added in a low voice, "Wait for me, Athos; be cheerful and lively as possible, and above all, don't allude to business affairs, for Heaven's sake!" and a renewed pressure of the hand impressed upon the count the necessity of being discreet and impenetrable.

Baisemeaux led D'Artagnan to the gate. Aramis, with many friendly protestations of delight, sat down by Athos, determined to make him speak; but Athos possessed all the virtues in their highest excellence. If necessity had required it, he would have been the finest orator in the world; but when there was need of silence he would die rather than utter a syllable.

Ten minutes after D'Artagnan's departure, the three gentlemen sat down to table, which was covered with the most substantial display of gastronomic luxury. Large joints, exquisite dishes, preserves, the greatest variety of wines, appeared successively upon the table, which was served at the king's expense, and of which expense M. Colbert would have no difficulty in saving two thirds, without any one in the Bastille being the worse for it.

Baisemeaux was the only one who ate and drank resolutely. Aramis allowed nothing to pass by him, but merely touched everything he took; Athos, after the soup and three *hors d'œuvres*, ate nothing more. The style of

conversation was such as it necessarily would be between three men so opposite in temper and ideas.

Aramis was incessantly asking himself by what extraordinary chance Athos was at Baisemeaux's when D'Artagnan was no longer there, and why D'Artagnan did not remain when Athos was there. Athos sounded all the depths of the mind of Aramis, who lived in the midst of subterfuge, evasion, and intrigue; he studied his man well and thoroughly, and felt convinced that he was engaged upon some important project. And then he too began to think of his own personal affair, and to lose himself in conjectures as to D'Artagnan's reason for having left the Bastille so abruptly, and for leaving behind him a prisoner so badly introduced and so badly looked after by the prison authorities.

But we shall not pause to examine into the thoughts and feelings of these personages; we will leave them to themselves, surrounded by the remains of poultry, game, and fish, mutilated by the generous knife of Baisemeaux. We are going to follow D'Artagnan instead, who, getting into the carriage which had brought him, cried out to the coachman, "To the king! and burn the pavement!"



## CHAPTER XXIV.

WHAT TOOK PLACE AT THE LOUVRE DURING THE SUPPER  
AT THE BASTILLE.

M. DE SAINT-AIGNAN had executed the commission with which the king had intrusted him for La Vallière, as we have already seen in one of the preceding chapters ; but whatever his eloquence might have been, he did not succeed in persuading the young girl that she had in the king a protector powerful enough for her under any combination of circumstances, and that she had no need of any one else in the world when the king was on her side. In point of fact, at the very first word which the favorite mentioned of the discovery of the famous secret, Louise, in a passion of tears, abandoned herself in utter despair to a sorrow which would have been far from flattering for the king, if he had been a witness of it from a corner of the room. De Saint-Aignan, in his character of ambassador, felt greatly offended at it, as his master himself would have been, and returned to announce to the king what he had seen and heard. It is there that we now find him, in a state of great agitation, in the presence of the king, still more agitated than he.

“But,” said the king to the courtier, when the latter had finished his report, “what did she decide to do? Shall I, at least, see her presently before supper? Will she come to me, or shall I be obliged to go to her room?”

“I believe, Sire, that if your Majesty wishes to see her, you will not only have to take the first step in advance, but will have to go the whole way.”

"Nothing for me! Does that Bragelonne still possess her heart?" muttered the king between his teeth.

"Oh, Sire, that is not possible; for it is you alone whom Mademoiselle de la Vallière loves, and that, too, with all her heart. But you know that De Bragelonne belongs to that proud race who play the part of Roman heroes."

The king smiled feebly; he knew how true the illustration was, for Athos had just left him.

"As for Mademoiselle de la Vallière," De Saint-Aignan continued, "she was brought up under the care of the Dowager Madame; that is to say, in austere retirement. This engaged young couple coldly exchanged their little vows in the presence of the moon and the stars; and now, when they find they have to break those vows, it plays the very deuce with them."

De Saint-Aignan thought he should have made the king laugh; but on the contrary, from a mere smile Louis passed to the greatest seriousness of manner. He already began to experience that remorse which the count had promised D'Artagnan he would inflict upon him. He reflected that, in fact, these young persons had loved and sworn fidelity to each other; that one of the two had kept his word, and that the other was too conscientious not to feel her perjury most bitterly; and with remorse, jealousy sharply pricked the king's heart. He did not say another word; and instead of going to pay a visit to his mother or the queen or Madame, in order to amuse himself a little and make the ladies laugh, as he himself used to say, he threw himself into the huge arm-chair in which his august father, Louis XIII., had passed so many weary days and years in company with Baradas and Cinq-Mars.

De Saint-Aignan perceived that the king was not to

be amused at that moment ; he tried a last resource, and pronounced Louise's name, which made the king look up immediately. "What does your Majesty intend to do this evening ? Shall Mademoiselle de la Vallière be informed of your intention to see her ?"

"It seems she is already aware of that," replied the king. "No, no, Saint-Aignan," he continued, after a moment's pause ; "we will both of us pass our time in dreaming. When Mademoiselle de la Vallière shall have sufficiently regretted what she now regrets, she will deign, perhaps, to give us some news of herself."

"Ah, Sire, is it possible you can so misunderstand that devoted heart ?"

The king rose, flushed with vexation ; he was a prey to jealousy in its turn. De Saint-Aignan was just beginning to feel that his position was becoming awkward, when the curtain before the door was raised. The king turned hastily round. His first idea was that a letter from Louise had arrived ; but instead of a letter of love, he saw only his captain of Musketeers standing upright and silent in the doorway. "M. d'Artagnan !" he said. "Ah ! well, Monsieur ?"

D'Artagnan looked at De Saint-Aignan ; Louis's eyes took the same direction as those of his captain. These looks would have been clear to any one, and they were especially so to De Saint-Aignan. The courtier bowed and quitted the room, leaving the king and D'Artagnan alone.

"Is it done ?" inquired the king.

"Yes, Sire," replied the captain of the Musketeers, in a grave voice, "it is done !"

The king was unable to say another word. Pride, however, obliged him not to pause there. Whenever a sovereign has adopted a decisive course, even though it be

unjust, he is compelled to prove to all witnesses, and particularly to himself, that he was quite right in so adopting it. A good means for effecting that — an almost infallible means, indeed — is to try to prove his victim to be in the wrong. Louis, brought up by Mazarin and Anne of Austria, knew better than any one else his vocation as a monarch ; he therefore endeavored to prove it on the present occasion. After a few moments' pause, which he had employed in making silently to himself the same reflections which we have just expressed aloud, he said in an indifferent tone, "What did the count say?"

"Nothing at all, Sire."

"Surely he did not allow himself to be arrested without saying something?"

"He said he expected to be arrested, Sire."

The king raised his head haughtily. "I presume," he said, "that M. le Comte de la Fère has not continued to play his obstinate and rebellious part?"

"In the first place, Sire, what do you term rebellious?" quietly asked the musketeer. "Is that man a rebel, in the eyes of the king, who not only allows himself to be shut up in the Bastille, but who even opposes those who do not wish to take him there?"

"Who do not wish to take him there!" exclaimed the king. "What do you say, Captain? Are you mad?"

"I believe not, Sire."

"You speak of persons who did not wish to arrest M. de la Fère?"

"Yes, Sire."

"And who are they?"

"Those whom your Majesty intrusted with that duty, apparently."

"But it is you whom I intrusted with it," exclaimed the king.

“Yes, Sire ; it is I.”

“And you say that, despite my orders, you had the intention of not arresting the man who had insulted me !”

“Yes, Sire, that was really my intention. I even proposed to the count to mount a horse that I had had prepared for him at the *Barrière de la Conférence*.”

“And what was your object in getting this horse ready ?”

“Why, Sire, in order that M. le Comte de la Fère might be able to reach Havre, and from that place make his escape to England.”

“You betrayed me then, Monsieur ?” cried the king, kindling with a wild pride.

“Exactly so.”

There was nothing to say in answer to statements made in such a tone ; the king was astounded at such an obstinate and open resistance on the part of D’Artagnan. “At least you had a reason, M. d’Artagnan, for acting as you did ?” said the king, proudly.

“I have always a reason, Sire.”

“Your reason cannot be your friendship for the count, at all events, — the only one that can be of any avail, the only one that could possibly excuse you, — for I placed you entirely at your ease in that respect.”

“Me, Sire ?”

“Did I not give you the choice to arrest or not to arrest M. le Comte de la Fère ?”

“Yes, Sire ; but —”

“But what ?” exclaimed the king, impatiently.

“But you warned me, Sire, that if I did not arrest him, your captain of the Guards should do so.”

“Was I not considerate enough towards you when I did not compel you to obey me ?”

“To me, Sire, you were, but not to my friend ; for my

friend would be arrested all the same, whether by myself or by the captain of the Guards."

"And this is your devotion, Monsieur, — a devotion which argues and reasons ! You are no soldier, Monsieur !"

"I wait for your Majesty to tell me what I am."

"Well, then, — you are a Frondeur."

"And since there is no longer any Fronde, Sire, in that case —"

"But if what you say is true —"

"What I say is always true, Sire."

"What have you come to say to me, Monsieur ?"

"I have come to say to your Majesty : Sire, M. de la Fère is in the Bastille."

"That is not your fault, it would seem."

"That is true, Sire. But, at all events, he is there ; and since he is there, it is important that your Majesty should know it."

"Ah, M. d'Artagnan, so you set your king at defiance !"

"Sire —"

"M. d'Artagnan, I warn you that you are abusing my patience."

"On the contrary, Sire."

"What do you mean by 'on the contrary' ?"

"I have come to get myself arrested too."

"To get yourself arrested, — you !"

"Of course. My friend will be lonely down there ; and I have come to propose to your Majesty to permit me to bear him company. If your Majesty will but give the word, I will arrest myself ; I shall not need the captain of the Guards for that, I assure you."

The king darted towards the table and seized a pen to write the order for D'Artagnan's imprisonment. "Pay attention, Monsieur, that this is forever !" cried the king, in a tone of stern menace.



"I can quite believe that," returned the musketeer; "for when you have once done such an act as that, you will never be able to look me in the face again."

The king dashed down his pen violently. "Leave the room, Monsieur!" he said.

"Oh, not so, Sire, if it please your Majesty!"

"How, not so?"

"Sire, I came to speak temperately to your Majesty. Your Majesty got into a passion with me: that is a misfortune; but I shall not the less on that account say what I had to say to you."

"Your resignation, Monsieur, — your resignation!" cried the king.

"Sire, you know whether I care about my resignation or not, since at Blois, on the day when you refused King Charles the million which my friend the Comte de la Fère gave him, I tendered my resignation to your Majesty."

"Very well, then, do it at once!"

"No, Sire; for there is no question of my resignation at the present moment. Your Majesty took up your pen just now to send me to the Bastille, — why should you change your intention?"

"D'Artagnan! Gascon that you are! who is the king, allow me to ask, — you or myself?"

"You, Sire, unfortunately."

"What do you mean by 'unfortunately'?"

"Yes, Sire; for if it were I —"

"If it were you, you would approve of M. d'Artagnan's rebellious conduct, I suppose?"

"Certainly."

"Really?" said the king, shrugging his shoulders.

"And I should tell my captain of the Musketeers," continued D'Artagnan, — "I should tell him, looking at him all the while with human eyes and not with eyes like coals

of fire, 'M. d'Artagnan, I have forgotten that I am king ; I have descended from my throne to insult a gentleman.'"

"Monsieur !" cried the king, "do you think you can excuse your friend by exceeding him in insolence ?"

"Oh, Sire ! I shall go much further than he did," said D'Artagnan ; "and it will be your own fault. I shall tell you what he, a man full of delicacy, did not tell you ; I shall say : 'Sire, you sacrificed his son, and he defended his son ; you sacrificed him ; he addressed you in the name of honor, of religion, of virtue, — you repulsed, pursued, imprisoned him.' I shall be harder than he was, for I shall say to you : 'Sire, choose ! Do you wish to have friends or lackeys, soldiers or slaves, great men or puppets ? Do you wish men to serve you or to crouch before you ? Do you wish men to love you or to fear you ? If you prefer baseness, intrigue, cowardice, — oh ! say it, Sire ! We will leave you, — we who are the only surviving illustrations, nay, I will say more, the only models of the valor of former times ; we who have done our duty, and have exceeded, perhaps, in courage and in merit the men already great for posterity. Choose, Sire, and without delay ! Whatever remains to you of the grand nobility, guard it with a jealous eye ; of courtiers you will always have enough. Delay not — and send me to the Bastille with my friend ; for if you have not known how to listen to the Comte de la Fère, that is to say, to the most sweet and noble voice of honor ; if you do not know how to listen to D'Artagnan, that is to say, to the most candid and rough voice of sincerity, — you are a bad king, and to-morrow will be a poor king. Now, bad kings are hated ; poor kings are driven away.' That is what I had to say to you, Sire ; you are wrong to have driven me to it."

The king threw himself back in his chair, cold and





livid. Had a thunderbolt fallen at his feet, he could not have been more astonished ; he appeared as if his respiration had ceased, and as if he were at the point of death. That rough voice of sincerity, as D'Artagnan had called it, had pierced through his heart like a sword-blade.

D'Artagnan had said all that he had to say. Comprehending the king's anger, he drew his sword, and approaching Louis XIV. respectfully, placed it on the table. But the king, with a furious gesture, thrust aside the sword, which fell on the ground and rolled to D'Artagnan's feet. Notwithstanding his mastery over himself, D'Artagnan too, in his turn, became pale and trembled with indignation. "A king," he said, "may disgrace a soldier, — he may exile him, and may even condemn him to death ; but were he a hundred times a king, he has no right to insult him by casting dishonor on his sword ! Sire, a king of France has never repulsed with contempt the sword of a man such as I am ! Stained with disgrace as this sword now is, it has henceforth no other sheath than either your heart or my own. I choose my own, Sire ; give thanks for it to God, and my patience." Then snatching up his sword, he cried, "My blood be upon your head !" and with a rapid gesture he placed the hilt upon the floor and directed the point of the blade towards his breast. The king, however, with a movement still more rapid than that of D'Artagnan, threw his right arm round the musketeer's neck, and with his left hand seized hold of the blade by the middle, and returned it silently to the scabbard. D'Artagnan, upright, pale, and still trembling, suffered the king to do all, without aiding him, to the very end. Then Louis, overcome, returned to the table, took a pen, wrote a few lines, signed them, and offered the paper to D'Artagnan.

"What is this paper, Sire ?" inquired the captain.

“An order for M. d’Artagnan to set the Comte de la Fère at liberty immediately.”

D’Artagnan seized the king’s hand and kissed it ; he then folded the order, placed it in his belt, and quitted the room.. Neither the king nor the captain spoke a word.

“Oh, human heart, director of kings !” murmured Louis, when alone ; “when shall I learn to read in your recesses, as in the leaves of a book ? No, I am not a bad king, nor am I a poor king ; but I am still a child.”



## CHAPTER XXV.

## POLITICAL RIVALS.

D'ARTAGNAN had promised M. de Baisemeaux to return in time for dessert, and he kept his word. They had just reached the finer and more delicate class of wines and liqueurs with which the governor's cellar had the reputation of being most admirably stocked, when the spurs of the captain resounded in the corridor, and he himself appeared at the threshold.

Athos and Aramis had played a close game ; neither had been able to gain the slightest advantage over the other. They had supped, talked a good deal about the Bastille, of the last journey to Fontainebleau, of the intended *fête* that M. Fouquet was about to give at Vaux ; they had generalized on every possible subject, and no one, excepting Baisemeaux, had alluded to private matters.

D'Artagnan arrived in the very midst of the conversation, still pale and disturbed by his interview with the king. Baisemeaux hastened to give him a chair ; D'Artagnan accepted a glass of wine, and set it down empty. Athos and Aramis both remarked his emotion ; as for Baisemeaux, he saw nothing more than the captain of the king's Musketeers, to whom he endeavored to show every attention. To be near the king entitled any one to all privileges, in the eyes of M. de Baisemeaux.

But although Aramis had remarked that emotion, he had not been able to guess the cause of it. Athos alone believed that he had detected it. To him D'Artagnan's

return, and particularly the manner in which he, usually so impassive, seemed overcome, signified, "I have just asked the king something which he has refused me." Thoroughly convinced that his conjecture was correct, Athos smiled, rose from the table, and made a sign to D'Artagnan, as if to remind him that they had something else to do than to sup together. D'Artagnan immediately understood him, and replied by another sign. Aramis and Baisemeaux watched this silent dialogue, and looked inquiringly at each other. Athos felt that he was called upon to give an explanation of what was passing.

"The truth is, my friends," said the Comte de la Fère, with a smile, "that you, Aramis, have been supping with a State criminal, and you, M. de Baisemeaux, with your prisoner."

Baisemeaux uttered an exclamation of surprise and almost of delight. That worthy man took pride in his fortress. Profit aside, the more prisoners he had, the happier he was; and the higher the prisoners were in rank, the prouder he felt.

Aramis assumed an expression which he thought the situation required, and said: "Well, dear Athos, forgive me; but I almost suspected what has happened. Some prank of Raoul or La Vallière, is it not?"

"Alas!" said Baisemeaux.

"And," continued Aramis, "you, a high and powerful nobleman as you are, forgetful that there are now only courtiers, — you have been to the king, and told him what you thought of his conduct?"

"Yes, you have guessed right."

"So that," said Baisemeaux, trembling at having supped so familiarly with a man who had fallen into disgrace with the king, — "so that, Monsieur the Count —"

"So that, my dear governor," said Athos, "my friend D'Artagnan will communicate to you the contents of the paper which I perceive just peeping out of his belt, and which assuredly can be nothing else than the order for my incarceration."

Baisemeaux held out his hand with his accustomed eagerness. D'Artagnan drew two papers from his belt, and presented one of them to the governor, who unfolded it, and then read, in a low tone of voice, looking at Athos over the paper, as he did so, and pausing from time to time: "'Order to detain in my château of the Bastille M. le Comte de la Fère.' Oh, Monsieur! this is indeed a very melancholy honor for me."

"You will have a patient prisoner, Monsieur," said Athos, in his calm, soft voice.

"A prisoner, too, who will not remain a month with you, my dear governor," said Aramis; while Baisemeaux, still holding the order in his hand, transcribed it upon the prison registry.

"Not a day, or rather not even a night," said D'Artagnan, displaying the second order of the king; "for now, dear M. de Baisemeaux, you will have the goodness to transcribe also this order for setting the count immediately at liberty."

"Ah!" said Aramis, "it is a labor that you have spared me, D'Artagnan;" and he pressed the musketeer's hand in a significant manner, and that of Athos at the same time.

"What!" said the latter, in astonishment, "the king sets me at liberty!"

"Read, my dear friend!" returned D'Artagnan.

Athos took the order and read it. "It is quite true," he said.

"Are you sorry for it?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Oh, no, on the contrary! I wish the king no harm; and the greatest evil or misfortune that any one can wish kings is that they should commit an act of injustice. But you have had a difficult and painful task, I know. Tell me, have you not, D'Artagnan?"

"I? Not at all," said the musketeer, laughing; "the king does everything I wish him to do."

Aramis looked fixedly at D'Artagnan, and saw that he was not speaking the truth. But Baisemeaux had eyes for nothing but D'Artagnan, so great was his admiration for a man who could make the king do all he wished.

"And does the king exile Athos?" inquired Aramis.

"No, not precisely. The king did not explain himself upon that subject," replied D'Artagnan; "but I think the count could not do better, unless indeed he wishes particularly to thank the king —"

"No, indeed," replied Athos, smiling.

"Well, then, I think," resumed D'Artagnan, "that the count cannot do better than to retire to his own château. However, my dear Athos, you have only to speak, to tell me what you want. If any particular place of residence is more agreeable to you than another, I can obtain it for you."

"No, thank you," said Athos; "nothing can be more agreeable to me, my dear friend, than to return to the solitude beneath my noble trees on the banks of the Loire. If Heaven be the overruling physician of the evils of the mind, Nature is a sovereign remedy. And so, Monsieur," continued Athos, turning again towards Baisemeaux, "I am now free, I suppose?"

"Yes, Monsieur the Count, I think so, — at least, I hope so," said the governor, turning over and over the two papers in question; "unless, however, M. d'Artagnan has a third order to give me."

"No, my dear M. Baisemeaux, no," said the musketeer; "the second is quite enough. We can stop there."

"Ah! Monsieur the Count," said Baisemeaux, addressing Athos, "you do not know what you are losing. I should have placed you at thirty livres, like the generals — what am I saying? — I mean at fifty livres, like the princes; and you would have supped every evening as you have supped to-night."

"Allow me, Monsieur," said Athos, "to prefer my mediocrity;" and then, turning to D'Artagnan, he said, "Let us go, my friend."

"Let us go," said D'Artagnan.

"Shall I have the happiness of having you as my companion?"

"To the city gate only," replied D'Artagnan; "after which I will tell you what I told the king: 'I am on duty.'"

"And you, dear Aramis," said Athos, smiling; "will you accompany me? La Fère is on the road to Vannes."

"Thank you, my dear friend," said Aramis; "but I have an appointment in Paris this evening, and I cannot leave without very serious interests suffering by my absence."

"In that case," said Athos, "I must say adieu, and take my leave of you. My dear M. de Baisemeaux, I have to thank you exceedingly for your good will, and particularly for the specimen you have given me of the Bastille fare;" and having embraced Aramis, and shaken hands with M. de Baisemeaux, and having received their wishes for an agreeable journey from them both, Athos set off with D'Artagnan.

While the *dénouement* of the scene of the Palais-Royal was taking place at the Bastille, let us relate what was



going on at the lodgings of Athos and of Bragelonne. Grimaud, as we have seen, had accompanied his master to Paris ; and, as we have said, he was present when Athos went out. He had seen D'Artagnan gnaw the corners of his mustache ; he had seen his master get into the carriage ; he had narrowly examined both their countenances, and he had known them both for a sufficiently long period to read and understand, through the mask of their impassiveness, that serious events were taking place. As soon as Athos had gone, he began to reflect ; then he remembered the strange manner in which Athos had taken leave of him, the embarrassment — imperceptible to any one but himself — of his master, — that man of clear ideas and straightforward will. He knew that Athos had taken nothing with him but the clothes he had on him at the time ; and yet he thought he saw that Athos had not left for an hour merely, or even for a day : a long absence was signified by the manner in which he pronounced the word “ Adieu.” All these circumstances recurred to his mind, with all his feelings of deep affection for Athos, with that horror of emptiness and solitude which invariably besets the minds of those who love ; and all these, combined, rendered poor Grimaud very melancholy and particularly very apprehensive. Without being able to account to himself for what he did after his master's departure, he wandered about the apartment, seeking as it were for some traces of him, like a faithful dog, who is not exactly uneasy about his absent master, but at least is restless. Only, as to the instinct of the animal Grimaud joined the reason of a man, he had at the same time restlessness and anxiety. Not having found any indication which could serve as a guide, and having neither seen nor discovered anything which could satisfy his doubts, Grimaud began to imagine what could



have happened. Now, the imagination is the resource, or rather the punishment, of good and affectionate hearts. In fact, never does a good heart represent its absent friend to itself as being happy or cheerful. Never does the pigeon who travels inspire anything but terror to the pigeon who remains at home.

Grimaud soon passed from anxiety to terror ; he carefully went over, in his own mind, everything that had taken place, — D'Artagnan's letter to Athos, the letter which had seemed to distress Athos so much ; then Raoul's coming to Athos, upon which Athos had asked for his orders and his court dress ; then his interview with the king, at the end of which Athos had returned home so gloomy ; then the explanation between the father and the son, at the termination of which Athos had embraced Raoul with such sadness of expression, while Raoul himself went away sorrowfully ; and finally, D'Artagnan's arrival, biting his mustache, and his leaving again in the carriage, accompanied by the Comte de la Fère. All this composed a drama in five acts, very plain, especially so to an analyst as skilful as Grimaud.

In the first place Grimaud resorted to grand measures : he searched in his master's coat for M. d'Artagnan's letter ; he found the letter still there, and this is what it contained :

MY DEAR FRIEND, — Raoul has been to ask me for some particulars about the conduct of Mademoiselle de la Vallière during our young friend's residence in London. I am a poor captain of Musketeers, whose ears are battered every day by the scandal of the barracks and the bedchamber. If I had told Raoul all I believe I know, the poor fellow would have died from it ; but I am in the king's service, and cannot speak of the king's affairs. If your heart tells you to do it, set off at once ; the matter concerns you more than myself, and almost as much as Raoul.

Grimaud tore, not a handful, but a finger-and-thumbful of hair out of his head ; he would have torn out more if his hair had been more abundant.

“ Yes,” he said, “ that is the key of the whole enigma. The young girl has been playing her pranks. What people say about her and the king is true, then. Our young master has been deceived ; he ought to know it. Monsieur the Count has been to see the king, and has given him a piece of his mind ; and then the king sent M. d’Artagnan to arrange the affair. Ah, my God ! ” continued Grimaud, “ Monsieur the Count, I now remember, returned without his sword.”

This discovery made the perspiration break out all over poor Grimaud’s face. He did not waste any more time in useless conjecture, but clapped his hat on his head and started for Raoul’s lodgings.

Raoul, after Louise had left him, had mastered his grief, if not his affection ; and compelled to look forward on that perilous road on which madness and rebellion were hurrying him, he had seen, from the very first glance, his father exposed to the royal obstinacy, since Athos had immediately exposed himself to that obstinacy. In this moment, when sympathy gave him insight, the unhappy young man recalled the mysterious signs which Athos had made, and the unexpected visit of D’Artagnan. The probable result of the conflict between a sovereign and a subject revealed itself to his terrified vision. As D’Artagnan was on duty, that is, fixed to his post, he certainly had not come to pay Athos a visit merely for the pleasure of seeing him. He must have come to say something to him. This something, in a crisis so serious, was either a misfortune or a danger. Raoul shuddered at his selfishness in having forgotten his father for his love, — in having occupied himself with dreams or the fascinations of despair

at a time when it was perhaps necessary to repel an imminent attack directed against Athos. The idea nearly drove him wild; he buckled on his sword and ran towards his father's lodgings. On his way thither he encountered Grimaud, who having set off from the opposite direction was running with equal eagerness in search of the truth. The two men embraced each other warmly; they were both at the same point of the parabola described by their imagination.

"Grimaud!" exclaimed Raoul.

"M. Raoul!" cried Grimaud.

"Is the count well?"

"Have you seen him?"

"No; where is he?"

"I am trying to find out."

"And M. d'Artagnan?"

"Went out with him."

"When?"

"Ten minutes after you had left."

"In what way did they go out?"

"In a carriage."

"Where did they go?"

"I have no idea at all."

"Did my father take any money with him?"

"No."

"Or his sword?"

"No."

"Grimaud!"

"M. Raoul!"

"I have an idea that M. d'Artagnan came to —"

"Arrest Monsieur the Count, do you not think, Monsieur?"

"Yes, Grimaud."

"I could have sworn it."

“What road did they take?”

“The way leading towards the quays.”

“To the Bastille, then?”

“Ah, my God! yes.”

“Quick, quick! let us run.”

“Yes, let us run.”

“But whither?” said Raoul, overwhelmed.

“We will go to M. d’Artagnan’s first; we may perhaps learn something there.”

“No; if he has kept it from me at my father’s, he will do the same everywhere. Let us go to — Oh, good heavens! why, I must be mad to-day, Grimaud.”

“Why so?”

“I have forgotten M. du Vallon — ”

“M. Porthos?”

“Who is waiting for and expecting me still! Alas! I have told you correctly, I am mad!”

“Where is he, then?”

“At the Minimes of Vincennes.”

“Thank goodness, that is in the direction of the Bastille. I will run and saddle the horses, and we will go at once,” said Grimaud.

“Do, my friend, do!”

## CHAPTER XXVI.

IN WHICH PORTHOS IS CONVINCED WITHOUT HAVING  
UNDERSTOOD ANYTHING.

THE worthy Porthos, faithful to all the laws of ancient chivalry, had determined to wait for M. de Saint-Aignan until sunset ; and as De Saint-Aignan did not come, as Raoul had forgotten to communicate with his second, and as he found that waiting so long was very wearisome, Porthos had desired one of the gate-keepers to fetch him a few bottles of good wine and a good joint of meat, — so that he at least might have the diversion of enjoying from time to time a glass of wine and a mouthful of something to eat. He had just finished when Raoul arrived escorted by Grimaud, both of them riding at full speed. When Porthos saw the two cavaliers riding at such a pace along the road, he did not for a moment doubt but that they were the men he was expecting ; and he rose from the grass upon which he had been indolently reclining, and began to stretch his legs and arms, saying, “ See what it is to have good habits ! The fellow has come, after all. If I had gone away, he would have found no one here, and would have taken an advantage from that.” He then threw himself into a martial attitude, and drew himself up to the full height of his gigantic stature. But instead of De Saint-Aignan, he saw only Raoul, who with the most despairing gestures accosted him by crying out, “ Pray forgive me, my dear friend ! I am most wretched.”

“ Raoul ! ” cried Porthos, surprised.

"You have been angry with me?" said Raoul, embracing Porthos.

"I? What for?"

"For having forgotten you. But, you see, I have lost my head."

"Ah, bah!"

"If you only knew, my friend!"

"You have killed him?"

"Whom?"

"De Saint-Aignan."

"Alas! we are far from De Saint-Aignan."

"What is the matter, then?"

"The matter is that M. le Comte de la Fère has been arrested."

Porthos gave a start that would have thrown down a wall. "Arrested!" he cried out; "by whom?"

"By D'Artagnan."

"It is impossible," said Porthos.

"It is nevertheless true," replied Raoul.

Porthos turned towards Grimaud, as if he needed a second confirmation of the intelligence. Grimaud nodded his head. "And where have they taken him?"

"Probably to the Bastille."

"What makes you think that?"

"As we came along we questioned some persons who saw the carriage pass, and others who saw it enter the Bastille."

"Oh! oh!" muttered Porthos; and he moved forward two steps.

"What do you intend to do?" inquired Raoul.

"I? Nothing; only, I will not have Athos remain at the Bastille."

"Do you know," said Raoul, advancing nearer to Porthos, "that the arrest was made by order of the king?"



Porthos looked at the young man as if to say, "What does that matter to me?" This dumb language seemed so eloquent of meaning to Raoul that he did not ask another question. He mounted his horse again; and Porthos, assisted by Grimaud, did the same.

"Let us arrange our plan of action," said Raoul.

"Yes," returned Porthos; "that is the best thing we can do."

Raoul sighed deeply, and then paused suddenly.

"What is the matter?" asked Porthos; "are you faint?"

"No; powerless. Can we three pretend to go and take the Bastille?"

"Well, if D'Artagnan were only here," replied Porthos, "I don't know about that."

Raoul was struck with admiration at the sight of that confidence, heroic in its simplicity. These were the celebrated men who by three or four attacked armies and assaulted castles, who had terrified death itself, and who survived the wrecks of an age, and were still stronger than the most robust among the young. "Monsieur," said he to Porthos, "you have just given me an idea; we absolutely must see M. d'Artagnan."

"Undoubtedly."

"He ought by this time to have returned home, after having taken my father to the Bastille. Let us go to his house."

"First inquire at the Bastille," said Grimaud, who was in the habit of speaking little, but to the purpose.

Accordingly they hastened towards the fortress, when one of those chances which Heaven bestows on men of strong will caused Grimaud suddenly to perceive the carriage which was entering by the great gate of the drawbridge. This was at the moment when D'Artagnan was, as we have seen, returning from his visit to the king. In vain Raoul urged on his horse to overtake the carriage and

see whom it contained. The horses had already gained the other side of the great gate, which again closed, while one of the sentries struck the nose of Raoul's horse with his musket. Raoul turned about, only too happy to find that he had ascertained something respecting the carriage which had contained his father.

"We have him," said Grimaud.

"If we wait a little, it is certain that he will leave ; don't you think so, my friend ?"

"Unless, indeed, D'Artagnan also be a prisoner," replied Porthos, "in which case everything is lost."

Raoul returned no answer, for any hypothesis was admissible. He instructed Grimaud to lead the horses to the little Rue Jean-Beausire, so as to give rise to less suspicion, and himself with his piercing gaze watched for the exit either of D'Artagnan or the carriage. It was a fortunate plan ; for twenty minutes had not elapsed before the gate reopened and the carriage reappeared. A dazzling of the eyes prevented Raoul from distinguishing what figures occupied the interior. Grimaud averred that he had seen two persons, and that one of them was his master. Porthos kept looking at Raoul and Grimaud by turns, in the hope of understanding their idea.

"It is clear," said Grimaud, "that if the count is in the carriage, either he is set at liberty or they are taking him to another prison."

"We shall soon see that by the road he takes," answered Porthos.

"If he is set at liberty," said Grimaud, "they will conduct him home."

"True," rejoined Porthos.

"The carriage does not take that way," cried Raoul ; and indeed the horses were just disappearing down the Faubourg St. Antoine.

"Let us hasten," said Porthos; "we will attack the carriage on the road, and tell Athos to flee."

"Rebellion," murmured Raoul.

Porthos darted a second glance at Raoul, quite worthy of the first. Raoul replied only by spurring the flanks of his steed. In a few moments the three cavaliers had overtaken the carriage, and followed it so closely that their horses' breath moistened the back of it. D'Artagnan, whose senses were ever on the alert, heard the trot of the horses at the moment when Raoul was telling Porthos to pass the chariot so as to see who was the person accompanying Athos. Porthos complied, but could not see anything, for the blinds were lowered. Rage and impatience were gaining mastery over Raoul. He had just noticed the mystery preserved by Athos's companion, and determined on proceeding to extremities. On his part D'Artagnan had clearly recognized Porthos, and Raoul also, from under the blinds, and had communicated to the count the result of his observation. They were desirous only of seeing whether Raoul and Porthos would push the affair to the uttermost. And this they speedily did. Raoul, presenting his pistol, threw himself on the leader, commanding the coachman to stop. Porthos seized the coachman and dragged him from his seat. Grimaud already had hold of the carriage door. Raoul threw open his arms, exclaiming, "Monsieur the Count! Monsieur the Count!"

"Ah! is it you, Raoul?" said Athos, intoxicated with joy.

"Not bad, indeed!" added D'Artagnan, with a burst of laughter; and they both embraced the young man and Porthos, who had captured them.

"My brave Porthos, best of friends!" cried Athos, "it is still the same with you."

"He is still only twenty," said D'Artagnan. "Bravo, Porthos!"

"Confound it!" answered Porthos, slightly confused, "we thought that you were arrested."

"While," rejoined Athos, "I was, in fact, only taking a drive in M. d'Artagnan's carriage."

"But we followed you from the Bastille," returned Raoul, with a tone of suspicion and reproach.

"Where we had been to take supper with our good friend M. Baisemeaux. You recollect Baisemeaux, Porthos?"

"Very well, indeed."

"And there we saw Aramis."

"In the Bastille?"

"At supper."

"Ah!" said Porthos, again breathing freely.

"He gave us a thousand messages for you."

"Thanks."

"And where is Monsieur the Count going?" asked Grimaud, already recompensed by a smile from his master.

"We are going home to Blois."

"How is that, — at once?"

"Yes; right forward."

"Without any luggage?"

"Oh! Raoul would have been instructed to forward me mine, or to bring it with him on his return, if he returns."

"If nothing detains him longer in Paris," said D'Artagnan, with a glance firm and cutting as steel, and as painful (for it reopened the poor young fellow's wounds), "he will do well to follow you, Athos."

"There is nothing to keep me any longer in Paris," said Raoul.

"Then we will go immediately," replied Athos.

"And M. d'Artagnan?"

"Oh! as for me, I was only accompanying Athos as far as the barrier, and I return with Porthos."

"Very good," said the latter.

"Come, my son," added the count, gently passing his arm round Raoul's neck to draw him into the carriage, and again embracing him. "Grimaud," continued the count, "you will return quietly to Paris with your horse and M. du Vallon's, for Raoul and I will mount here and give up the carriage to these two gentlemen to return to Paris in; and then, as soon as you arrive, you will take my clothes and letters, and forward the whole to me at home."

"But," observed Raoul, who was anxious to make the count converse, "when you return to Paris, there will not be a single thing there for you, — which will be very inconvenient."

"I think it will be a very long time, Raoul, ere I return to Paris. The last sojourn we have made there has not been of a nature to encourage me to repeat it."

Raoul hung his head, and said not a word more. Athos descended from the carriage, and mounted the horse which had brought Porthos, and which seemed no little pleased at the exchange. Then they embraced, clasped one another's hands, and interchanged a thousand pledges of eternal friendship. Porthos promised to spend a month with Athos at the first opportunity. D'Artagnan engaged to take advantage of his first leave of absence; and then, having embraced Raoul for the last time, "To you, my boy," said he, "I will write." Coming from D'Artagnan, who he knew wrote but very seldom, these words expressed everything. Raoul was moved even to tears. He tore himself away from the musketeer, and departed.

D'Artagnan rejoined Porthos in the carriage. "Well," said he, "my dear friend, what a day we have had!"

"Indeed, we have," answered Porthos.



"You must be quite worn out?"

"Not quite; however, I shall retire early to rest, so as to be ready to-morrow."

"And wherefore?"

"Why, to complete what I have begun."

"You make me shudder, my friend; you seem to me quite angry. What the devil have you begun which is not finished?"

"Listen! Raoul has not fought; it is necessary that I should fight."

"With whom? — with the king?"

"How!" exclaimed Porthos, astounded, "with the king?"

"Yes, I say, you great baby! with the king."

"I assure you it is with M. de Saint-Aignan."

"Look now, this is what I mean: you draw your sword against the king in fighting with this gentleman."

"Ah!" said Porthos, staring; "are you sure of it?"

"Indeed, I am."

"How shall we arrange it, then?"

"We must try and make a good supper, Porthos. The captain of the Musketeers keeps a tolerable table. There you will see the handsome De Saint-Aignan, and will drink his health."

"I!" cried Porthos, horrified.

"What!" said D'Artagnan, "you refuse to drink the king's health?"

"But, body alive! I am not talking to you about the king at all; I am speaking of M. de Saint-Aignan."

"But since I repeat that it is the same thing —"

"Ah, well, well!" said Porthos, overcome.

"You understand, don't you?"

"No," answered Porthos; "but 't is all the same."

"Yes, it is all the same," replied D'Artagnan; "let us go to supper, Porthos."



## CHAPTER XXVII.

## M. DE BAISEMEAUX'S "SOCIETY."

THE reader has not forgotten that, on quitting the Bastille, D'Artagnan and the Comte de la Fère had left Aramis in close confabulation with Baisemeaux. When once these two guests had departed, Baisemeaux did not in the least perceive that the conversation suffered by their absence. He thought that wine after supper, and that of the Bastille in particular, was excellent; and that it was a stimulant quite sufficient to make an honest man talk. But he little knew his Greatness, who was never more impenetrable than at dessert. His Greatness, however, perfectly understood M. de Baisemeaux, when he reckoned on making the governor discourse by the means which the latter regarded as efficacious. The conversation, therefore, without flagging in appearance, flagged in reality; for Baisemeaux not only had it nearly all to himself, but further, kept speaking only of that singular event, — the incarceration of Athos, followed by so prompt an order to set him again at liberty. Nor, moreover, had Baisemeaux failed to observe that the order of arrest and that of liberation were both in the king's hand. But the king would not take the trouble to write such orders except under pressing circumstances. All this was very interesting, and, above all, very puzzling to Baisemeaux; but as, on the other hand, all this was very clear to Aramis, the latter did not attach to the occurrence the same importance as did the worthy governor. Besides, Aramis rarely put

himself out of the way for anything, and he had not yet told M. de Baisemeaux for what reason he had now done so ; and so, at the very climax of Baisemeaux's dissertation, Aramis suddenly interrupted him.

"Tell me, my dear M. Baisemeaux," said he, "have you never any other diversions at the Bastille than those at which I have assisted during the two or three visits I have had the honor to pay you?"

This address was so unexpected that the governor, like a vane which suddenly receives an impulsion opposed to that of the wind, was quite dumfounded at it. "Diversions!" said he; "but I take them continually, Monseigneur."

"Oh, to be sure! And these diversions —"

"Are of every kind."

"Visits, no doubt?"

"No, not visits. Visits are not frequent at the Bastille."

"What! are visits rare, then?"

"Very rare."

"Even on the part of your society?"

"What do you mean by my 'society,' — the prisoners?"

"Oh, no! Your prisoners, indeed! I know well it is you who visit them, and not they you. By your society I mean, my dear M. Baisemeaux, the society of which you are a member."

Baisemeaux looked fixedly at Aramis, and then, as if the idea which had flashed across his mind were impossible, "Oh!" he said, "I have very little society at present. If I must own it to you, my dear M. d'Herblay, the fact is, to stay at the Bastille appears for the most part distressing and distasteful to persons of the gay world. As for the ladies, it is never without a dread, which costs me infinite trouble to allay, that they come to

my quarters. And, indeed, how should they avoid trembling a little, poor things, when they see those gloomy dungeons, and reflect that they are inhabited by prisoners who — " In proportion as the eyes of Baisemeaux concentrated their gaze on the face of Aramis, the worthy governor's tongue faltered more and more, until finally it stopped altogether.

"No, you don't understand me, my dear M. Baisemeaux, — you don't understand me. I do not at all mean to speak of society in general, but of a particular society, — of the society, in a word, to which you are affiliated."

Baisemeaux nearly dropped the glass of muscat which he was in the act of raising to his lips. "Affiliated!" cried he, "affiliated!"

"Yes, affiliated, undoubtedly," repeated Aramis, with the greatest self-possession. "Are you not a member of a secret society, my dear M. Baisemeaux?"

"Secret?"

"Secret or mysterious."

"Oh, M. d'Herblay!"

"See! you don't deny it."

"But, believe me —"

"I believe what I know."

"I swear to you."

"Listen to me, my dear M. Baisemeaux! I say 'yes,' you say 'no.' One of us two necessarily says what is true; and the other, it inevitably follows, what is false."

"Well, and then?"

"Well, we shall come to an understanding presently."

"Let us see," said Baisemeaux; "let us see."

"Now drink your glass of muscat, dear M. Baisemeaux," said Aramis. "What the devil! you look quite scared."

"No, no, not the least in the world; no."

"Drink, then."

Baisemeaux drank, but he swallowed the wrong way.

"Well," resumed Aramis, "if, I say, you are not a member of a society, secret or mysterious, whichever you like to call it, — the epithet is of no consequence, — if, I say, you are not a member of a society similar to that I wish to designate, well, then, you will not understand a word of what I am going to say, that is all."

"Oh! be sure beforehand that I shall not understand anything."

"Well, well!"

"Try now; let us see."

"That is what I am going to do. If, on the contrary, you are one of the members of this society, you will immediately answer me 'yes' or 'no.'"

"Begin your questions, then," continued Baisemeaux, trembling.

"You will agree, dear M. de Baisemeaux," continued Aramis, with the same impassiveness, "that it is evident a man cannot be a member of a society, it is evident that he cannot enjoy the advantages it offers to the affiliated, without being himself bound to certain little services."

"In short," stammered Baisemeaux, "that would be intelligible if —"

"Well," resumed Aramis, "there is in the society of which I speak, and of which, as it seems, you are not a member —"

"Allow me," said Baisemeaux; "I should not like to say absolutely."

"There is an engagement entered into by all the governors and captains of fortresses affiliated to the order." Baisemeaux grew pale. "Now the engagement," continued Aramis, firmly, "is of this nature."

Baisemeaux rose, manifesting unspeakable emotion. "Go on, dear M. d'Herblay; go on!" said he.

Aramis then spoke, or rather recited, the following sentence, in the same tone as if he had been reading it from a book: "The aforesaid captain or governor of a fortress shall allow to enter, when need shall arise, and on demand of the prisoner, a confessor affiliated to the order." He stopped. Baisemeaux was quite distressing to look at, being so wretchedly pale and trembling. "Is not that the text of the agreement?" quietly asked Aramis.

"Monseigneur!" began Baisemeaux.

"Ah, well, you begin to understand, I think."

"Monseigneur," cried Baisemeaux, "do not trifle so with my unhappy mind! I find myself nothing in your hands, if you have the malignant desire to draw from me the little secrets of my administration."

"Oh, by no means! Pray undeceive yourself, dear M. Baisemeaux; it is not the little secrets of your administration that I aim at, but those of your conscience."

"Well, then, my conscience be it, my dear M. d'Herblay! But have some consideration for the situation I am in, which is no ordinary one."

"It is no ordinary one, my dear monsieur," continued the inflexible Aramis, "if you are a member of this society; but it is quite a natural one if, free from all engagements, you are answerable only to the king."

"Well, Monsieur, well! I obey only the king. Good God! whom else would you have a French gentleman obey?"

Aramis did not yield an inch; but with that silvery voice of his continued: "It is very pleasant for a French gentleman, for a prelate of France, to hear a man of your mark express himself so loyally, dear De Baisemeaux, and having heard you, to believe no more than you do."

"Have you doubted, Monsieur?"



"I? Oh, no!"

"And so you doubt no longer?"

"I have no longer any doubt that such a man as you, Monsieur," said Aramis, gravely, "does not faithfully serve the masters whom he voluntarily chose for himself."

"Masters!" cried Baisemeaux.

"Yes, masters, I said."

"M. d'Herblay, you are still jesting, are you not?"

"Oh, yes! I understand that it is a more difficult position to have several masters than one; but the embarrassment is owing to you, my dear Baisemeaux, and I am not the cause of it."

"Certainly not," returned the unfortunate governor, more embarrassed than ever; "but what are you doing? You are leaving the table?"

"Assuredly."

"Are you going?"

"Yes, I am going."

"But you are behaving very strangely towards me, Monseigneur."

"I am behaving strangely, — in what respect?"

"Have you sworn, then, to put me to the torture?"

"No, I should be sorry to do so."

"Remain, then."

"I cannot."

"And why?"

"Because I have no longer anything to do here; and, indeed, I have duties to fulfil elsewhere."

"Duties so late as this?"

"Yes; understand me now, my dear M. de Baisemeaux. They told me at the place whence I came, 'The aforesaid governor or captain will allow to enter, as need shall arise, on the prisoner's demand, a confessor affiliated with the order.' I came; you do not know what I mean, and so



I shall return to tell them that they are mistaken, and that they must send me elsewhere."

"What! you are—" cried Baisemeaux, looking at Aramis almost in terror.

"The confessor affiliated to the order," said Aramis, without changing his voice.

But, gentle as the words were, they had the same effect on the unhappy governor as a clap of thunder. Baisemeaux became livid, and it seemed to him as if Aramis's beaming eyes were two forks of flame, piercing to the very bottom of his soul. "The confessor!" murmured he; "you, Monseigneur, the confessor of the order!"

"Yes, I; but we have nothing to unravel together, seeing that you are not one of the affiliated."

"Monseigneur!"

"And I understand that, not being so, you refuse to comply with its commands."

"Monseigneur, I beseech you, condescend to hear me."

"And wherefore?"

"Monseigneur, I do not say that I have nothing to do with the society."

"Ah! ah!"

"I say not that I refuse to obey."

"Nevertheless, M. de Baisemeaux, what has passed wears very much the air of resistance."

"Oh, no, Monseigneur, no! I only wished to be certain."

"To be certain of what?" said Aramis, in a tone of supreme contempt.

"Of nothing at all, Monseigneur." Baisemeaux lowered his voice, and bending before the prelate said, "I am at all times and in all places at the disposal of my masters, but —"

"Very good. I like you better thus, Monsieur," said

Aramis, as he resumed his seat, and put out his glass to Baisemeaux, whose hand trembled so that he could not fill it. "You were saying 'but' —" continued Aramis.

"But," replied the unhappy man, "having no notice, I was far from expecting."

"Does not the Gospel say, 'Watch, for the moment is known only of God'? Do not the rules of the order say, 'Watch; for that which I will, you ought always to will also'? And on what pretext is it that you did not expect the confessor, M. de Baisemeaux?"

"Because, Monseigneur, there is at present in the Bastille no prisoner ill."

Aramis shrugged his shoulders. "What do you know about that?" said he.

"But nevertheless, it appears to me —"

"M. de Baisemeaux," said Aramis, turning round in his chair, "here is your servant, who wishes to speak with you;" and at this moment Baisemeaux's servant appeared at the threshold of the door.

"What is it?" asked Baisemeaux, sharply.

"Monsieur," said the man, "they are bringing you the doctor's return."

Aramis looked at Baisemeaux with a calm and confident eye.

"Well," said Baisemeaux, "let the messenger enter."

The messenger entered, saluted, and handed in the report. Baisemeaux ran his eye over it, and raising his head said, in surprise, "No. 2 Bertaudière is ill."

"How was it, then," said Aramis, carelessly, "that you told me everybody was well in your hotel, M. de Baisemeaux?" and he emptied his glass without removing his eyes from Baisemeaux.

The governor then made a sign to the messenger, and

when he had quitted the room said, still trembling, "I think that there is in the article, 'on the prisoner's demand.'"

"Yes, it is so ;" answered Aramis. "But see what it is they want with you now."

At that moment a sergeant put his head in at the door. "What do you want now?" cried Baisemeaux. "Can you not leave me in peace for ten minutes?"

"Monsieur," said the sergeant, "the sick man, No. 2 Bertaudière, has commissioned the turnkey to request you to send him a confessor."

Baisemeaux very nearly sank on the floor ; but Aramis disdained to reassure him, just as he had disdained to terrify him. "What must I answer?" inquired Baisemeaux.

"Just what you please," replied Aramis, compressing his lips ; "that is your business. *I* am not governor of the Bastille."

"Tell the prisoner," cried Baisemeaux, quickly, — "tell the prisoner that his request is granted." The sergeant left the room. "Oh, Monseigneur, Monseigneur," murmured Baisemeaux, "how could I have suspected? — how could I have foreseen this?"

"Who told you to suspect, and who asked you to foresee?" contemptuously answered Aramis. "The order suspects, the order knows, the order foresees, — is not that enough?"

"What do you command?" added Baisemeaux.

"I? — nothing at all. I am nothing but a poor priest, a simple confessor. Have I your orders to go and see the sufferer?"

"Oh, Monseigneur, I do not order ; I pray you to go."

"Tis well ; then conduct me to him."

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## THE PRISONER.

SINCE Aramis's singular transformation into a confessor of the order, Baisemeaux was no longer the same man. Up to that period the place which Aramis had held in the worthy governor's estimation was that of a prelate whom he respected and a friend to whom he owed a debt of gratitude; but after that revelation which had upset all his ideas, he felt himself an inferior, and that Aramis was his master. He himself lighted a lantern, summoned a turnkey, and said, returning to Aramis, "I am at your orders, Monseigneur."

Aramis merely nodded his head, as much as to say, "Very good;" and signed to him with his hand to lead the way. Baisemeaux advanced, and Aramis followed him.

It was a beautiful starry night; the steps of the three men resounded on the flags of the terraces, and the clinking of the keys hanging from the jailer's girdle made itself heard up to the stories of the towers, as if to remind the prisoners that liberty was out of their reach. It might have been said that the alteration effected in Baisemeaux had extended itself even to the prisoners. The turnkey, the same who on Aramis's first arrival had shown himself so inquisitive and curious, had now become not only silent, but even impassible. He held his head down, and seemed afraid to keep his ears open. In this wise they reached the basement of the Bertaudière, the first two stories of which were mounted silently and somewhat slowly; for Baisemeaux, though far from disobeying, was

far from exhibiting any eagerness to obey. Finally, they arrived at the door. The jailer had the key ready, and opened the door. Baisemeaux showed a disposition to enter the prisoner's chamber ; but Aramis, stopping him on the threshold, said, "The rules do not allow the governor to hear the prisoner's confession."

Baisemeaux bowed, and made way for Aramis, who took the lantern and entered, and then signed to them to close the door behind him. For an instant he remained standing, listening to learn whether Baisemeaux and the turnkey had retired ; but as soon as he was assured by the dying sound of their footsteps that they had left the tower, he put the lantern on the table and gazed around. On a bed of green serge, similar in all respects to the other beds in the Bastille, save that it was newer, under ample curtains half drawn, reposed a young man to whom we have once before introduced Aramis. According to custom, the prisoner was without a light. At the hour of curfew he was bound to extinguish his lamp ; it may be seen how much he was favored in being allowed to keep it burning until that hour. Near the bed a large leathern arm-chair, with twisted legs, held his clothes. A little table — without pens, books, paper, or ink — stood deserted near the window ; while several plates, still unemptied, showed that the prisoner had scarcely touched his recent repast. Aramis saw that the young man was stretched upon his bed, his face half concealed by his arms. The arrival of a visitor did not cause any change of position ; either he was waiting in expectation or he was asleep. Aramis lighted the candle from the lantern, pushed back the arm-chair, and approached the bed with an appearance of mingled interest and respect.

The young man raised his head. "What is it ?" said he.

"Have you not desired a confessor ?" replied Aramis.



"Yes."

"Because you are ill?"

"Yes."

"Very ill?"

The young man gave Aramis a piercing glance, and answered, "I thank you." After a moment's silence, "I have seen you before," he continued.

Aramis bowed.

Doubtless the scrutiny which the prisoner had just made of the cold, crafty, and imperious character stamped upon the features of the Bishop of Vannes was little reassuring to one in his situation, for he added, "I am better."

"And then?" said Aramis.

"Why, then, being better, I have no longer the same need of a confessor, I think."

"Not even of the haircloth, of which the note you found in your bread informed you?"

The young man started; but before he had either assented or denied, Aramis continued, "Not even of the ecclesiastic from whom you were to hear an important revelation?"

"If it be so," said the young man, sinking again on his pillow, "it is different; I listen."

Aramis then looked at him more closely, and was struck with the easy majesty of his mien,—one which can never be acquired unless Heaven has implanted it in the blood or in the heart.

"Sit down, Monsieur!" said the prisoner.

Aramis bowed and obeyed.

"How does the Bastille agree with you?" asked the bishop.

"Very well."

"You do not suffer?"

"No."



“You have nothing to regret?”

“Nothing.”

“Not even your liberty?”

“What do you call liberty, Monsieur?” asked the prisoner, with the tone of a man who is preparing for a struggle.

“I call liberty the flowers, the air, light, the stars, the happiness of going whithersoever the nervous limbs of twenty years of age may wish to carry you.”

The young man smiled, — whether in resignation or contempt, it would have been difficult to tell. “Look!” said he; “I have in that Japanese vase two roses gathered yesterday evening in the bud from the governor’s garden. This morning they have blown and spread their vermilion chalices beneath my gaze; with every opening petal they unfold the treasures of their perfume, filling my chamber with fragrance. Look now on these two roses; even among roses these are beautiful, and the rose is the most beautiful of flowers. Why, then, do you bid me desire other flowers when I possess the loveliest of all?”

Aramis gazed at the young man in surprise.

“If *flowers* constitute liberty,” sadly resumed the captive, “I am free, for I possess them.”

“But the air!” cried Aramis, — “air so necessary to life!”

“Well, Monsieur,” returned the prisoner, “draw near to the window; it is open. Between heaven and earth the wind whirls its storms of hail and lightning, wafts its warm mists, or breathes in gentle breezes. It caresses my face. When mounted on the back of this arm-chair, with my arm around the bars of the window to sustain myself, I fancy I am swimming in the wide expanse.”

The countenance of Aramis darkened while the young man was speaking.

"Light!" continued the prisoner, — "I have what is better than light! I have the sun, — a friend who comes to visit me every day without the permission of the governor or the jailer's company. He comes in at the window, and traces in my room a quadrilateral which starts from the window and reaches to the hangings of my bed. This luminous figure increases from ten o'clock till mid-day, and decreases from one till three slowly, as if, having hastened to come, it sorrowed at leaving me. When its last ray disappears, I have enjoyed its presence for four hours. Is not that sufficient? I have been told that there are unhappy beings who dig in quarries, and laborers who toil in mines, who never behold the sun at all."

Aramis wiped the drops from his brow.

"As to the stars which are so delightful to view," continued the young man, "they all resemble one another save in size and brilliancy. I am a favored mortal; for if you had not lighted that candle, you would have been able to see the beautiful star which I was gazing at from my couch before your arrival, and whose rays were playing over my eyes."

Aramis lowered his head; he felt himself overwhelmed by the bitter flow of that sinister philosophy which is the religion of the captive.

"So much, then, for the flowers, the air, the daylight, and the stars," tranquilly continued the young man; "there remains freedom of movement. Do I not walk all day in the governor's garden if it is fine; here, if it rains; in the fresh air, if it is warm; in the warm, thanks to my fireplace, if it be cold? Ah, Monsieur, do you fancy," continued the prisoner, not without bitterness, "that men have not done everything for me that a man can hope for or desire?"

"Men!" said Aramis, raising his head; "be it so! But it seems to me you forget Heaven."

"Indeed, I have forgotten Heaven," murmured the prisoner, without emotion; "but why do you mention it? Of what use is it to talk to a prisoner of Heaven?"

Aramis looked steadily at this singular youth, who possessed the resignation of a martyr with the smile of an atheist. "Is not God in everything?" he murmured in a reproachful tone.

"Say rather, at the end of everything," answered the prisoner, firmly.

"Be it so," said Aramis; "but let us return to our starting-point."

"I desire nothing better," returned the young man.

"I am your confessor."

"Yes."

"Well, then, you ought, as a penitent, to tell me the truth."

"All that I wish is to tell it to you."

"Every prisoner has committed some crime for which he has been imprisoned. What crime, then, have you committed?"

"You asked me the same question the first time you saw me," returned the prisoner.

"And then, as now, you evaded giving me an answer."

"And what reason have you for thinking that I shall now reply to you?"

"Because this time I am your confessor."

"Then, if you wish me to tell what crime I have committed, explain to me in what a crime consists; for as my conscience does not accuse me, I aver that I am not a criminal."

"We are often criminals in the sight of the great of the earth, not alone for having ourselves committed

crimes, but because we know that crimes have been committed."

The prisoner manifested the deepest attention. "Yes, I understand you," he said, after a pause; "yes, you are right, Monsieur. It is very possible that in that light I am a criminal in the eyes of the great."

"Ah! then you know something," said Aramis, who thought he had pierced not merely through a defect in the harness, but through the joints of it.

"No, I am not aware of anything," replied the young man; "but sometimes I think, and I say to myself in those moments —"

"What do you say to yourself?"

"That if I were to think any further, I should either go mad or I should divine a great deal."

"And then — and then —" said Aramis, impatiently.

"Then I leave off."

"You leave off?"

"Yes; my head becomes confused, and my ideas melancholy. I feel ennui overtaking me; I wish —"

"What?"

"I don't know; but I do not like to give myself up to longing for things which I do not possess, when I am so happy with what I have."

"You are afraid of death?" said Aramis, with a slight uneasiness.

"Yes," said the young man, smiling.

Aramis felt the chill of that smile, and shuddered. "Oh, as you fear death, you know more than you admit!" he cried.

"And you," returned the prisoner, "who bade me to ask to see you, — you, who when I did ask for you came here promising a world of confidence, — how is it that, nevertheless, it is you who are silent, and 't is I who

“speak? Since, then, we both wear masks, either let us both retain them or put them aside together.”

Aramis felt the force and justice of the remark, saying to himself, “This is no ordinary man.” “Are you ambitious?” said he suddenly to the prisoner, aloud, without preparing him for the alteration.

“What do you mean by ambition?” replied the youth.

“It is,” replied Aramis, “a feeling which prompts a man to desire more than he has.”

“I said that I was contented, Monsieur; but perhaps I deceive myself. I am ignorant of the nature of ambition; but it is not impossible I may have some. Come, open my mind; I ask nothing better.”

“An ambitious man,” said Aramis, “is one who covets what is beyond his station.

“I covet nothing beyond my station,” said the young man, with an assurance of manner which yet again made the Bishop of Vannes tremble.

Aramis was silent. But to look at the kindling eye, the knitted brow, and the reflective attitude of the captive, it was evident that he expected something more than silence. That silence Aramis now broke. “You lied the first time I saw you,” said he.

“Lied!” cried the young man, starting up on his couch, with such a tone in his voice and such lightning in his eyes that Aramis recoiled in spite of himself.

“I should say,” returned Aramis, bowing, “you concealed from me what you knew of your infancy.”

“A man’s secrets are his own, Monsieur,” retorted the prisoner, “and not at the mercy of the first chance-comer.”

“True,” said Aramis, bowing still lower than before, “’t is true; pardon me, but to-day do I still occupy the place of a chance-comer? I beseech you to reply, Monseigneur.”



This title slightly disturbed the prisoner; but nevertheless he did not appear astonished that it was given to him. "I do not know you, Monsieur," said he.

"Oh, if I but dared, I would take your hand and would kiss it!"

The young man seemed as if he were going to give Aramis his hand; but the light which beamed in his eyes faded away, and he coldly and distrustfully withdrew his hand. "Kiss the hand of a prisoner!" he said, shaking his head; "to what purpose?"

"Why did you tell me," said Aramis, "that you were happy here? Why, that you aspired to nothing? Why, in a word, by thus speaking, do you prevent me from being frank in my turn?"

The same light shone a third time in the young man's eyes, but died as before, without leading to anything.

"You distrust me," said Aramis.

"And why say you so, Monsieur?"

"Oh, for a very simple reason! If you know what you ought to know, you ought to mistrust everybody."

"Then be not astonished that I am mistrustful, since you suspect me of knowing what I know not."

Aramis was struck with admiration at this energetic resistance. "Oh, Monseigneur, you drive me to despair!" said he, striking the arm-chair with his fist.

"And on my part I do not comprehend you, Monsieur."

"Well, then, try to understand me." The prisoner looked fixedly at Aramis. "Sometimes it seems to me," said the latter, "that I have before me the man whom I seek, and then —"

"And then your man disappears, — is it not so?" said the prisoner, smiling. "So much the better."

Aramis rose. "Certainly," said he; "I have nothing further to say to a man who mistrusts me as you do."



“And I, Monsieur,” said the prisoner, in the same tone, “have nothing to say to a man who will not understand that a prisoner ought to be mistrustful of everybody.”

“Even of his old friends?” said Aramis. “Oh, Monseigneur, you are too cautious!”

“Of my old friends? — you one of my old friends, — you?”

“Do you no longer remember,” said Aramis, “that you once saw in the village where your early years were spent — ”

“Do you know the name of the village?” asked the prisoner.

“Noisy-le-Sec, Monseigneur,” answered Aramis, firmly.

“Go on!” said the young man, without expression of assent or denial on his countenance.

“Stay, Monseigneur!” said Aramis; “if you are positively resolved to carry on this game, let us break off. I am here to tell you many things, ’t is true; but you must allow me to see that, on your side, you have a desire to know them. Before revealing the important matters I conceal, be assured that I am in need of some encouragement, if not candor; a little sympathy, if not confidence. But you keep yourself intrenched in a pretended ignorance which paralyzes me. Oh, not for the reason you think; for ignorant as you may be, or indifferent as you feign to be, you are none the less what you are, Monseigneur, and there is nothing — nothing, mark me! — which can cause you not to be so.”

“I promise you,” replied the prisoner, “to hear you without impatience. Only, it appears to me that I have a right to repeat the question I have already asked, — ‘Who are you?’”

“Do you remember, fifteen or eighteen years ago, seeing at Noisy-le-Sec a cavalier, accompanied by a lady plainly

dressed in black silk, with flame-colored ribbons in her hair?"

"Yes," said the young man; "I once asked the name of this cavalier, and was told that he called himself the Abbé d'Herblay. I was astonished that the abbé had so warlike an air, and was told that there was nothing singular in that, seeing that he was one of Louis XIII.'s musketeers."

"Well," said Aramis, "that musketeer of other times, that abbé afterwards, then Bishop of Vannes, is to-day your confessor."

"I know it; I recognized you."

"Then, Monseigneur, if you know that, I must add a fact of which you are ignorant, — that if the king were to know this evening of the presence here of this musketeer, this abbé, this bishop, this confessor, he who has risked everything to visit you would to-morrow see glitter the executioner's axe at the bottom of a dungeon more gloomy and more obscure than yours."

While hearing these words, delivered with emphasis, the young man had raised himself on his couch and gazed more and more eagerly at Aramis. The result of this scrutiny was that he appeared to derive some confidence from it. "Yes," he murmured, "I remember perfectly. The woman of whom you speak came once with you, and twice afterwards with the woman —" He hesitated.

"With another woman who came to see you every month, — is it not so, Monseigneur?"

"Yes."

"Do you know who this lady was?"

The light seemed ready to flash from the prisoner's eyes. "I am aware that she was one of the ladies of the court," he said.

"You remember that lady well, do you not?"

“Oh, my recollection can hardly be very confused on this head!” said the young prisoner. “I saw that lady once with a gentleman about forty-five years old. I saw her once with you, and with the lady dressed in black with flame-colored ribbons. I have seen her twice since with the same person. These four persons, with my tutor and old Perronnette, my jailer and the governor of the prison, are the only persons with whom I have ever spoken, and, indeed, almost the only persons I have ever seen.”

“Then, you were in prison?”

“If I am a prisoner here, there I was comparatively free, although in a very narrow sense. A house which I never quitted, a garden surrounded with walls I could not clear, — these constituted my residence; but you know it, as you have been there. In a word, being accustomed to live within these bounds, I never cared to leave them. And so you will understand, Monsieur, that not having seen anything of the world, I can desire nothing; and therefore, if you relate anything, you will be obliged to explain everything to me.”

“And I will do so,” said Aramis, bowing; “for it is my duty, Monseigneur.”

“Well, then, begin by telling me who was my tutor.”

“A worthy and above all an honorable gentleman, Monseigneur; fit guide both for body and soul. Had you ever any reason to complain of him?”

“Oh, no; quite the contrary. But this gentleman of yours often used to tell me that my father and mother were dead. Did he deceive me, or did he speak the truth?”

“He was compelled to comply with the orders given him.”

“Then he lied?”

“In one respect. Your father is dead.”

“And my mother?”

“She is dead for you.”

“But then she lives for others, does she not?”

“Yes.”

“And I — and I, then [the young man looked sharply at Aramis], am compelled to live in the obscurity of a prison?”

“Alas! I fear so.”

“And that because my presence in the world would lead to the revelation of a great secret?”

“Certainly, a very great secret.”

“My enemy must indeed be powerful, to be able to shut up in the Bastille a child such as I then was.”

“He is.”

“More powerful than my mother, then?”

“And why do you ask that?”

“Because my mother would have taken my part.”

Aramis hesitated. “Yes, Monseigneur; more powerful than your mother.”

“Seeing, then, that my nurse and preceptor were carried off, and that I also was separated from them, — either they were, or I am, very dangerous to my enemy?”

“Yes; a peril from which he freed himself by causing the nurse and preceptor to disappear,” answered Aramis, quietly.

“Disappear!” cried the prisoner; “but how did they disappear?”

“In the surest possible way,” answered Aramis: “they are dead.”

The young man turned visibly pale, and passed his hand tremblingly over his face. “From poison?” he asked.

“From poison.”

The prisoner reflected a moment. “My enemy must indeed have been very cruel, or hard beset by necessity, to

assassinate those two innocent persons, my sole support ; for that worthy gentleman and that poor woman had never harmed a living being."

"In your family, Monseigneur, necessity is stern. And so it is necessity which compels me, to my great regret, to tell you that this gentleman and the unhappy lady were assassinated."

"Oh, you tell me nothing I am not aware of!" said the prisoner, knitting his brows.

"How?"

"I suspected it."

"Why?"

"I will tell you."

At this moment the young man, supporting himself on his elbows, drew close to Aramis's face, with such an expression of dignity, of self-command, and of defiance even, that the bishop felt the electricity of enthusiasm strike in devouring flashes from that seared heart of his into his brain of adamant.

"Speak, Monseigneur! I have already told you that by conversing with you I endanger my life. Little value as it has, I implore you to accept it as the ransom of your own."

"Well," resumed the young man, "this is why I suspected that they had killed my nurse and my preceptor —"

"Whom you used to call your father."

"Yes ; whom I called my father, but whose son I well knew I was not."

"Who caused you to suppose so?"

"Just as you, Monsieur, are too respectful for a friend, he was also too respectful for a father,"

"I, however," said Aramis, "have no intention to disguise myself."



The young man nodded assent, and continued : " Undoubtedly, I was not destined to perpetual seclusion," said the prisoner ; " and that which makes me believe so now, above all, is the care that was taken to render me as accomplished a cavalier as possible. The gentleman attached to my person taught me everything he knew himself, — mathematics, a little geometry, astronomy, fencing, and riding. Every morning I went through military exercises, and practised on horseback. Well, one morning during summer, it being very hot, I went to sleep in the hall. Nothing up to that period, except the respect paid me by my tutor, had enlightened me, or even roused my suspicions. I lived as children, as birds, as plants, as the air and the sun do. I had just turned my fifteenth year — "

" This, then, was eight years ago ? "

" Yes, nearly ; but I have ceased to reckon time. "

" Excuse me ; but what did your tutor tell you, to encourage you to work ? "

" He used to say that a man was bound to make for himself in the world that fortune which Heaven had refused him at his birth. He added, that, being a poor obscure orphan, I had no one but myself to look to ; and that nobody either did or ever would take any interest in me. I was, then, in the hall I have spoken of, asleep from fatigue in fencing. My tutor was in his room on the first floor, just over me. Suddenly I heard him exclaim ; and then he called, ' Perronnette ! Perronnette ! ' It was my nurse whom he called. "

" Yes ; I know it," said Aramis. " Continue, Monseigneur ! "

" Very likely she was in the garden ; for my tutor came hastily downstairs. I rose, anxious at seeing him anxious. He opened the garden door, still crying out, ' Perronnette ! Perronnette ! ' The windows of the hall looked into the



court. The shutters were closed ; but through a chink in them I saw my tutor draw near a large well, which was almost directly under the windows of his study. He stooped over the brim, looked into the well, again cried out, and made wild and affrighted gestures. Where I was, I could not only see, but hear ; and see and hear I did."

"Go on, I pray you !" said Aramis.

"Dame Perronnette came running up, hearing the governor's cries. He went to meet her, took her by the arm, and drew her quickly towards the edge ; after which, as they both bent over it together, 'Look, look !' cried he ; 'what a misfortune !' 'Calm yourself, calm yourself,' said Perronnette ; 'what is the matter ?' 'The letter !' he exclaimed ; 'do you see that letter ?' pointing to the bottom of the well. 'What letter ?' she cried. 'The letter you see down there, — the last letter from the queen.' At this word I trembled. My tutor — he who passed for my father, he who was continually recommending to me modesty and humility — in correspondence with the queen ! 'The queen's last letter !' cried Perronnette, without showing other astonishment than at seeing this letter at the bottom of the well ; 'but how came it there ?' 'A chance, Dame Perronnette, — a singular chance. I was entering my room ; and on opening the door, the window too being open, a puff of air came suddenly and carried off this paper, — this letter from the queen ; I darted after it, and gained the window just in time to see it flutter a moment in the breeze and disappear down the well.' 'Well,' said Dame Perronnette ; 'and if the letter has fallen into the well, 't is all the same as if it were burned ; and as the queen burns all her letters every time she comes —' 'Every time she comes !' So this lady who came every month was the queen," said the prisoner.

“Yes,” nodded Aramis.

“‘Doubtless, doubtless,’ continued the old gentleman; ‘but this letter contained instructions, — how can I follow them?’ ‘Write immediately to her; give her a plain account of the accident, and the queen will no doubt write you another letter in place of this.’ ‘Oh! the queen would never believe the story,’ said the good gentleman, shaking his head; ‘she will imagine that I want to keep this letter instead of giving it up like the rest, so as to have a hold over her. She is so distrustful, and M. de Mazarin so — This devil of an Italian is capable of having us poisoned at the first breath of suspicion.’”

Aramis almost imperceptibly smiled.

“‘You know, Dame Perronnette, they are both so suspicious in all that concerns Philippe.’ ‘Philippe’ was the name they gave me,” said the prisoner. ‘Well, ’t is no use hesitating,’ said Dame Perronnette; ‘somebody must go down the well.’ ‘Of course; so that the person who goes down may read the paper as he is coming up.’ ‘But let us choose some villager who cannot read, and then you will be at ease.’ ‘Granted; but will not any one who descends guess that a paper must be important for which we risk a man’s life? However, you have given me an idea, Dame Perronnette; somebody shall go down the well, but that somebody shall be myself.’ But at this notion Dame Perronnette lamented and cried in such a manner, and so implored the old nobleman, with tears in her eyes, that he promised her to obtain a ladder long enough to reach down, while she went in search of some stout-hearted youth, whom she was to persuade that a jewel had fallen into the well, and that this jewel was wrapped in a paper. ‘And as paper,’ remarked my preceptor, ‘naturally unfolds in water, the young man would not be surprised at finding nothing, after all, but the letter

wide open.' 'But perhaps the writing will be already effaced by that time,' said Dame Perronnette. 'No consequence, provided we secure the letter. On returning it to the queen, she will see at once that we have not betrayed her; and consequently, as we shall not rouse the distrust of Mazarin, we shall have nothing to fear from him.' Having come to this resolution, they parted. I pushed back the shutter, and seeing that my tutor was about to re-enter, threw myself on my couch, in a confusion of brain caused by all I had just heard. My tutor opened the door a few moments after, and thinking I was asleep, gently closed it again. As soon as ever it was shut, I rose, and listening heard the sound of retiring footsteps. Then I returned to the shutter, and saw my tutor and Dame Perronnette go out together. I was alone in the house. They had hardly closed the gate before I sprang from the window and ran to the well. Then, just as my tutor had leaned over, so leaned I. Something white and luminous glistened in the green and quivering ripples of the water. The brilliant disk fascinated and allured me; my eyes became fixed, and I could hardly breathe. The well seemed to draw me in with its large mouth and icy breath; and I thought I read, at the bottom of the water, characters of fire traced upon the letter the queen had touched. Then, scarcely knowing what I was about, and urged on by one of those instinctive impulses which drive men upon their destruction, I made fast one end of the rope to the bottom of the well-curb; I left the bucket hanging about three feet under water, — at the same time taking infinite pains not to disturb that coveted letter, which was beginning to change its white tint for a greenish hue, — proof enough that it was sinking, — and then, with a piece of wet canvas protecting my hands, slid down into the abyss. When I saw myself hanging over the

dark pool, when I saw the sky lessening above my head, a cold shudder came over me, I was seized with giddiness, and the hair rose on my head; but my strong will mastered all. I gained the water, and at once plunged into it, holding on by one hand, while I immersed the other and seized the precious paper, which, alas! came in two in my grasp. I concealed the two fragments in my coat, and helping myself with my feet against the side of the pit, and clinging on with my hands, agile and vigorous as I was, and above all pressed for time, I regained the brink, drenching it as I touched it with the water that streamed from all the lower part of my body. Once out of the well with my prize I rushed into the sunlight, and took refuge in a kind of shrubbery at the bottom of the garden. As I entered my hiding-place, the bell which resounded when the great gate was opened, rang. It was my tutor returning. I had but just time. I calculated that it would take ten minutes before he would gain my place of concealment, even if, guessing where I was, he came straight to it; and twenty if he were obliged to look for me. But this was time enough to allow me to read the cherished letter, whose fragments I hastened to unite again. The writing was already fading, but I managed to decipher it all."

"And what read you there, Monseigneur?" asked Aramis, deeply interested.

"Quite enough, Monsieur, to see that my tutor was a man of noble rank, and that Perronnette, without being a lady of quality, was far better than a servant; and also to perceive that I must myself be high-born, since the queen, Anne of Austria, and Mazarin, the prime minister, commended me so earnestly to their care."

Here the young man paused, quite overcome.

"And what happened?" asked Aramis.

"It happened, Monsieur," answered he, "that the workmen they had summoned found nothing in the well, after the closest search; that my tutor perceived that the brink was watery; that I was not so well dried by the sun as to escape Dame Perronnette's observing that my garments were moist; and, lastly, that I was seized with a violent fever, owing to the chill and the excitement of my discovery, an attack of delirium supervening, during which I related the whole adventure; so that, guided by my avowal, my tutor found under the bolster the two pieces of the queen's letter."

"Ah!" said Aramis, "now I understand."

"Beyond this, all is conjecture. Doubtless the unfortunate lady and gentleman, not daring to keep the occurrence secret, wrote all to the queen, and sent back to her the torn letter."

"After which," said Aramis, "you were arrested and removed to the Bastille?"

"As you see."

"Then your two attendants disappeared?"

"Alas!"

"Let us not take up our time with the dead, but see what can be done with the living. You told me you were resigned?"

"I repeat it."

"Without any desire for freedom?"

"As I told you."

"Without ambition, sorrow, or thought?"

The young man made no answer.

"Well," asked Aramis, "why are you silent?"

"I think that I have spoken enough," answered the prisoner, "and that now it is your turn. I am weary."

Aramis gathered himself up, and a shade of deep solem-



nity spread itself over his countenance. It was evident that he had reached the crisis in the part he had come to the prison to play. "One question," said Aramis.

"What is it? Speak!"

"In the house you inhabited there were neither looking-glasses nor mirrors, were there?"

"What are those two words, and what is their meaning?" asked the young man; "I do not even know them."

"They designate two pieces of furniture which reflect objects; so that, for instance, you may see in them your own lineaments, as you see mine now, with the naked eye."

"No; there was neither a glass nor a mirror in the house," answered the young man.

Aramis looked round him. "Nor is there here, either," he said; "they have taken the same precaution."

"To what end?"

"You will know directly. Now, you have told me that you were instructed in mathematics, astronomy, fencing, and riding; but you have not said a word about history."

"My tutor sometimes related to me the principal deeds of the King Saint Louis, King Francis I., and King Henry IV."

"Is that all?"

"That is about all."

"This also was done by design; just as you were deprived of mirrors, which reflect the present, so you were left in ignorance of history, which reflects the past. Since your imprisonment books have been forbidden you; so that you are unacquainted with a number of facts by means of which you would be able to reconstruct the shattered edifice of your recollections and your interests."



"It is true," said the young man.

"Listen, then : I will in a few words tell you what has passed in France during the last twenty-three or twenty-four years, — that is, from the probable date of your birth ; in a word, from the time that interests you."

"Say on !" and the young man resumed his serious and attentive attitude.

"Do you know who was the son of Henry IV. ?"

"At least I know who his successor was."

"How ?"

"By means of a coin dated 1610, which bears the effigy of Henry IV. ; and another of 1612, bearing that of Louis XIII. So I presumed that, there being only two years between the two dates, Louis was Henry's successor."

"Then," said Aramis, "you know that the last reigning monarch was Louis XIII. ?"

"I do," answered the youth, slightly reddening.

"Well, he was a prince full of noble ideas and great projects, always, alas ! deferred by the troubles of the times and the struggle that his minister Richelieu had to maintain against the great nobles of France. The king himself was of a feeble character, and died young and unhappy."

"I know it."

"He had been long anxious about having an heir, — a care which weighs heavily on princes, who desire to leave behind them more than one pledge that they will be remembered and their work will be continued."

"Did King Louis XIII. die without children ?" asked the prisoner, smiling.

"No ; but he was long without one, and for a long while thought he should be the last of his race. This idea had reduced him to the depths of despair, when suddenly his wife, Anne of Austria —"

The prisoner trembled.

"Did you know," said Aramis, "that Louis XIII.'s wife was called Anne of Austria?"

"Continue!" said the young man, without replying to the question.

"When suddenly," resumed Aramis, "the queen announced an interesting event. There was great joy at the intelligence, and all prayed for her happy delivery. On the 5th of September, 1638, she gave birth to a son." Here Aramis looked at his companion, and thought he observed him turning pale. "You are about to hear," said Aramis, "an account which few could now give; for it refers to a secret which is thought to be buried with the dead or entombed in the abyss of the confessional."

"And you will tell me this secret?" broke in the youth.

"Oh!" said Aramis, with unmistakable emphasis, "I do not know that I ought to risk this secret by intrusting it to one who has no desire to quit the Bastille."

"I listen, Monsieur."

"The queen, then, gave birth to a son. But while the court was rejoicing over the event, when the king had shown the new-born child to the nobility and people, and was sitting gayly down to table to celebrate the event, the queen, who was alone in her room, was again taken ill, and gave birth to a second son."

"Oh!" said the prisoner, betraying a better acquaintance with affairs than he had admitted, "I thought that Monsieur was only born in —"

Aramis raised his finger. "Let me continue," he said.

The prisoner sighed impatiently, and paused.

"Yes," said Aramis, "the queen had a second son, whom Dame Perronnette, the midwife, received in her arms."

"Dame Perronnette !" murmured the young man.

"They ran at once to the banqueting-room, and whispered to the king what had happened ; he rose and quitted the table. But this time it was no longer happiness that his face expressed, but something akin to terror. The birth of twins changed into bitterness the joy to which that of an only son had given rise, seeing that in France (a fact of which you are assuredly ignorant) it is the oldest of the king's sons who succeeds his father —"

"I know it."

"And that the doctors and jurists assert that there is ground for doubting whether he who first makes his appearance is the elder by the law of Heaven and of Nature."

The prisoner uttered a smothered cry, and became whiter than the coverlet under which he hid himself.

"Now you understand," pursued Aramis, "that the king, who with so much pleasure saw himself repeated in one, was in despair about two ; fearing that the second might dispute the claim of the first to seniority, which had been recognized only two hours before, and so this second son, relying on party interests and caprices, might one day sow discord and engender civil war in the kingdom, — by these means destroying the very dynasty he should have strengthened."

"Oh, I understand, I understand !" murmured the young man.

"Well," continued Aramis, "this is what is related ; this is why one of the queen's two sons, shamefully parted from his brother, shamefully sequestered, is buried in the profoundest obscurity ; this is why that second son has disappeared, and so completely that not a soul in France, save his mother, is aware of his existence."

"Yes; his mother, who has cast him off!" cried the prisoner, in a tone of despair.

"Except also," Aramis went on, "the lady in the black dress; and, finally, excepting —"

"Excepting yourself, is it not, — you, who come and relate all this, — you, who come to rouse in my soul curiosity, hatred, ambition, and perhaps even the thirst of vengeance; — except you, Monsieur, who, if you are the man whom I expect, to whom the note I have received applies, whom, in short, Heaven ought to send me, must possess about you —"

"What?" asked Aramis.

"A portrait of the king, Louis XIV., who at this moment reigns upon the throne of France."

"Here is the portrait," replied the bishop, handing the prisoner a miniature in enamel, on which Louis was depicted life-like, with a handsome, lofty mien. The prisoner eagerly seized the portrait, and gazed at it with devouring eyes. "And now, Monseigneur," said Aramis, "here is a mirror."

Aramis left the prisoner time to recover his ideas.

"So high, so high!" murmured the young man, eagerly comparing the likeness of Louis with his own countenance reflected in the glass.

"What do you think of it?" at length said Aramis.

"I think that I am lost," replied the captive; "the king will never set me free."

"And I — I demand," added the bishop, fixing his piercing eyes significantly upon the prisoner, — "I demand which of the two is the king, — the one whom this miniature portrays, or the one whom the glass reflects?"

"The king, Monsieur," sadly replied the young man, "is he who is on the throne, who is not in prison, and

who, on the other hand, can cause others to be entombed there. Royalty is power; and you see well how powerless I am."

"Monseigneur," answered Aramis, with a respect he had not yet manifested, "the king, mark me, will, if you desire it, be he who quitting his dungeon shall maintain himself upon the throne on which his friends will place him."

"Tempt me not, Monsieur!" broke in the prisoner, bitterly.

"Be not weak, Monseigneur," persisted Aramis. "I have brought all the proofs of your birth: consult them; satisfy yourself that you are a king's son; and then let us act."

"No, no; it is impossible."

"Unless, indeed," resumed the bishop, ironically, "it be the destiny of your race that the brothers excluded from the throne shall be always princes without valor and without honor, as was your uncle M. Gaston d'Orléans, who ten times conspired against his brother Louis XIII."

"What!" cried the prince, astonished; "my uncle Gaston 'conspired against his brother,' — conspired to dethrone him?"

"Exactly, Monseigneur; for no other reason."

"What are you telling me, Monsieur?"

"I tell you the truth."

"And he had friends, — devoted ones?"

"As much so as I am to you."

"And, after all, what did he do? — Failed!"

"He failed, I admit, but always through his own fault; and for the sake of purchasing, not his life (for the life of the king's brother is sacred and inviolable), but his liberty, he sacrificed the lives of all his friends,

one after another ; and so at this day he is the very shame of history, and the detestation of a hundred noble families in this kingdom."

"I understand, Monsieur ; either by weakness or treachery, my uncle slew his friends."

"By weakness ; which in princes is always treachery."

"And cannot a man fail, then, from incapacity and ignorance ? Do you really believe it possible that a poor captive such as I, brought up not only at a distance from the court, but even from the world, — do you believe it possible that such a one could assist those of his friends who should attempt to serve him ?" And as Aramis was about to reply, the young man suddenly cried out, with a violence which betrayed the temper of his blood : "We are speaking of friends ; but how can *I* have any friends, — I, whom no one knows, and who have neither liberty, money, nor influence to gain any ?"

"I fancy I had the honor to offer myself to your royal Highness."

"Oh, do not style me so, Monsieur ; 't is either irony or cruelty ! Do not lead me to think of aught else than these prison walls which confine me ; let me again love, or at least submit to, my slavery and my obscurity."

"Monseigneur, Monseigneur ! if you again utter these desperate words, if after having received proof of your high birth you still remain poor-spirited and of feeble purpose, I will comply with your desire, — I will depart, and renounce forever the service of a master to whom so eagerly I came to devote my assistance and my life !"

"Monsieur," cried the prince, "would it not have been better for you to have reflected, before telling me all that you have done, that you would break my heart forever ?"

"And so I desired to do, Monseigneur."

"Is a prison the fitting place to talk to me about power,



grandeur, and even royalty? You wish to make me believe in splendor, and we are lying hidden in night; you boast of glory, and we are smothering our words in the curtains of this miserable bed; you give me glimpses of absolute power, and I hear the step of the jailer in the corridor, — that step which, after all, makes you tremble more than it does me. To render me somewhat less incredulous, free me from the Bastille; give air to my lungs, spurs to my feet, a sword to my arm, and we shall begin to understand each other."

"It is precisely my intention to give you all this, Monseigneur, and more; only, do you desire it?"

"A word more," said the prince. "I know there are guards in every gallery, bolts to every door, cannon and soldiery at every barrier. How will you overcome the sentries, spike the guns? How will you break through the bolts and bars?"

"Monseigneur, how did you get the note which announced my arrival to you?"

"You can bribe a jailer for such a thing as a note."

"If we can corrupt one turnkey, we can corrupt ten."

"Well, I admit that it may be possible to release a poor captive from the Bastille; possible so to conceal him that the king's people shall not again ensnare him; possible, in some unknown retreat, to sustain the unhappy wretch in some suitable manner."

"Monseigneur!" said Aramis, smiling.

"I admit that whoever would do thus much for me would seem more than mortal in my eyes; but as you tell me I am a prince, brother of a king, how can you restore me the rank and power of which my mother and my brother have deprived me? And as I must pass a life of war and hatred, how will you make me conqueror in those combats, and invulnerable to my enemies? Ah, Mon-

sieur, reflect upon this! Place me, to-morrow, in some dark cavern in a mountain's base; yield me the delight of hearing in freedom the sounds of river and plain, of beholding in freedom the sun of the blue heavens, or the stormy sky,—and it is enough. Promise me no more than this,—for, indeed, more you cannot give; and it would be a crime to deceive me, since you call yourself my friend."

Aramis waited in silence. "Monseigneur," he resumed after a moment's reflection, "I admire the firm, sound sense which dictates your words; I am happy to have discovered my monarch's mind."

"Again, again! oh, for mercy's sake," cried the prince, pressing his icy hands upon his clammy brow, "do not play with me! I have no need to be a king to be the happiest of men."

"But I, Monseigneur, wish you to be a king for the good of humanity."

"Ah!" said the prince, with fresh distrust inspired by the word,— "ah! with what, then, has humanity to reproach my brother?"

"I forgot to say, Monseigneur, that if you condescend to allow me to guide you, and if you consent to become the most powerful monarch on earth, you will have promoted the interests of all the friends whom I devote to the success of your cause; and these friends are numerous."

"Numerous?"

"Still less numerous than powerful, Monseigneur."

"Explain yourself."

"It is impossible. I will explain, I swear before Heaven, on that day when I see you sitting on the throne of France."

"But my brother?"

“You shall decree his fate. Do you pity him?”

“Him who leaves me to perish in a dungeon? No; I do not pity him.”

“So much the better.”

“He might have himself come to this prison, have taken me by the hand, and have said, ‘My brother, Heaven created us to love, not to contend with each other. I come to you. A barbarous prejudice has condemned you to pass your days in obscurity, far from all men and deprived of every joy. I will make you sit down beside me; I will buckle round your waist our father’s sword. Will you take advantage of this reconciliation to put down or to restrain me? Will you employ that sword to spill my blood?’ ‘Oh, never!’ I would have replied to him; ‘I look on you as my preserver, and will respect you as my master. You give me far more than Heaven bestowed; for through you I possess liberty and the privilege of loving and being loved in this world.’”

“And you would have kept your word, Monseigneur?”

“Oh, on my life!”

“While now?”

“While now I perceive that I have guilty ones to punish.”

“In what manner, Monseigneur?”

“What do you say as to the resemblance that Heaven has given me to my brother?”

“I say that there was in that likeness a providential instruction which the king ought to have heeded; I say that your mother committed a crime in rendering those different in happiness and fortune whom Nature created so similar in her womb; and I conclude that the object of punishment should be only to restore the equilibrium.”

“By which you mean —”

"That if I restore you to your place on your brother's throne, he shall take yours in prison."

"Alas! there is so much suffering in prison, especially to a man who has drunk so deeply of the cup of enjoyment."

"Your royal Highness will always be free to act as you may desire; and if it seems good to you, after punishment, may pardon."

"Good! And now, are you aware of one thing, Monsieur?"

"Tell me, my Prince."

"It is that I will hear nothing further from you till I am clear of the Bastille."

"I was going to say to your Highness that I should only have the pleasure of seeing you once again."

"And when?"

"The day when my Prince leaves these gloomy walls."

"Heavens! how will you give me notice?"

"By coming here to seek you."

"Yourself?"

"My Prince, do not leave this chamber save with me; or if in my absence you are compelled to do so, remember that I am not concerned in it."

"And so, I am not to speak a word of this to any one whatever, save to you?"

"Save only to me." Aramis bowed very low.

The prince offered his hand. "Monsieur," he said, in a tone that issued from his heart, "one word more, — my last. If you have sought me for my destruction; if you are only a tool in the hands of my enemies; if from our conference, in which you have sounded the depths of my mind, anything worse than captivity result, — that is to say, if death befall me, — still receive my blessing, for you will have ended my troubles and given me repose from the tormenting fever that has preyed upon me these eight years."

“Monseigneur, wait the result ere you judge me,” said Aramis.

“I say that in such a case I should bless and forgive you. If, on the other hand, you are come to restore me to that position in the sunshine of fortune and glory to which I was destined by Heaven; if by your aid I am enabled to live in the memory of man, and confer lustre on my race by deeds of valor or by solid benefits bestowed upon my people; if from my present depths of sorrow, aided by your generous hand, I raise myself to the very height of honor,—then to you, whom I thank with blessings, to you will I offer half my power and my glory; though you would still be but partly recompensed, and your share must always remain incomplete, since I could not divide with you the happiness received at your hands.”

“Monseigneur,” replied Aramis, moved by the pallor and excitement of the young man, “the nobleness of your heart fills me with joy and admiration. It is not you who will have to thank me, but rather the nation whom you will render happy, the posterity whose name you will make glorious. Yes; I shall have bestowed upon you more than life,—I shall give you immortality.”

The prince offered his hand to Aramis, who sank upon his knee and kissed it. “Oh!” cried the prince, with a charming modesty.

“It is the first act of homage paid to our future king,” said Aramis. “When I see you again, I shall say, ‘Good-day, Sire.’”

“Till then,” said the young man, pressing his wan and wasted fingers over his heart,—“till then, no more dreams, no more strain upon my life,—it would break! Oh, Monsieur, how small is my prison,—how low the window,—how narrow are the doors! To think that so

much pride, splendor, and happiness should be able to enter in and remain here !”

“Your royal Highness makes me proud,” said Aramis, “since you imply it is I who brought all this ;” and he rapped immediately on the door.

The jailer came to open it with Baisemeaux, who devoured by fear and uneasiness was beginning, in spite of himself, to listen at the door. Happily, neither of the speakers had forgotten to smother his voice, even in the most passionate outbreaks.

“What a confession !” said the governor, forcing a laugh ; “who would believe that a mere recluse, a man almost dead, could have committed crimes so numerous, and taking so long to tell of ?”

Aramis made no reply. He was eager to leave the Bastille, where the secret which overwhelmed him seemed to double the weight of the walls.

As soon as they reached Baisemeaux’s quarters, “Let us proceed to business, my dear governor,” said Aramis.

“Alas !” replied Baisemeaux.

“You have to ask me for my receipt for one hundred and fifty thousand livres,” said the bishop.

“And to pay over the first third of the sum,” added the poor governor, with a sigh, taking three steps towards his iron strong-box.

“Here is the receipt,” said Aramis.

“And here is the money,” returned Baisemeaux, with a threefold sigh.

“The order instructed me only to give a receipt ; it said nothing about receiving the money,” rejoined Aramis. “Adieu, Monsieur the Governor !” And he departed, leaving Baisemeaux stifled with joy and surprise at this regal gift so grandly given by the Confessor Extraordinary to the Bastille.



## CHAPTER XXIX.

HOW MOUSTON HAD BECOME FATTER WITHOUT GIVING PORTHOS NOTICE THEREOF, AND OF THE TROUBLES WHICH CONSEQUENTLY BEFELL THAT WORTHY GENTLEMAN.

AFTER the departure of Athos for Blois, Porthos and D'Artagnan were seldom together. One was occupied with harassing duties for the king; the other had been making many purchases of furniture, which he intended to forward to his estate, and by aid of which he hoped to establish in his various residences something of that court luxury which he had witnessed in all its dazzling brightness in his Majesty's society.

D'Artagnan, ever faithful, one morning during an interval of service thought about Porthos, and being uneasy at not having heard anything of him for a fortnight, directed his steps towards his hotel, and pounced upon him just as he was getting up. The worthy baron had a pensive, — nay, more, a melancholy air. He was sitting on his bed, only half dressed, and with legs dangling over the edge, contemplating a great number of garments, which with their fringes, lace, embroidery, and slashes of ill-assorted hues were strewed all over the floor.

Porthos, sad and reflective as La Fontaine's hare, did not observe D'Artagnan's entrance, which was moreover screened at this moment by M. Mouston, whose personal corpulence, quite enough at any time to hide one man from another, was for the moment doubled by a scarlet coat which the intendant was holding up by the sleeves

for his master's inspection, that he might the better see it all over. D'Artagnan stopped at the threshold, and looked at the pensive Porthos ; and then, as the sight of the innumerable garments strewing the floor caused mighty sighs to heave from the bosom of that excellent gentleman, D'Artagnan thought it time to put an end to these dismal reflections, and coughed by way of announcing himself.

"Ah !" exclaimed Porthos, whose countenance brightened with joy, "ah ! ah ! Here is D'Artagnan. I shall, then, get hold of an idea !"

At these words Mouston, doubting what was going on behind him, got out of the way, smiling kindly at the friend of his master, who thus found himself freed from the material obstacle which had prevented his reaching D'Artagnan. Porthos made his sturdy knees crack again in rising, and crossing the room in two strides found himself face to face with his friend, whom he folded to his breast with a force of affection that seemed to increase with every day. "Ah !" he repeated, "you are always welcome, dear friend ; but just now you are more welcome than ever."

"But you seem in the dumps here?" exclaimed D'Artagnan.

Porthos replied by a look expressive of dejection.

"Well, then, tell me all about it, Porthos, my friend, unless it is a secret."

"In the first place," returned Porthos, "you know I have no secrets from you. This, then, is what saddens me."

"Wait a minute, Porthos ; let me first get rid of all this litter of satin and velvet."

"Oh, never mind !" said Porthos, contemptuously ; "it is all trash."

"Trash, Porthos! Cloth at twenty livres an ell, gorgeous satin, regal velvet!"

"Then you think these clothes are —"

"Splendid, Porthos, splendid. I'll wager that you alone in France have so many; and suppose you never had any more made, and were to live a hundred years, which would n't astonish me, you could still wear a new dress the day of your death without being obliged to see the nose of a single tailor from now till then."

Porthos shook his head.

"Come, my friend," said D'Artagnan, "this unnatural melancholy in you frightens me. My dear Porthos, pray get out of it, then; and the sooner the better."

"Yes, my friend, so I will; if indeed it is possible."

"Perhaps you have received bad news from Bracieux?"

"No; they have felled the wood, and it has yielded a third more than the estimate."

"Then has there been a falling off in the pools of Pierrefonds?"

"No, my friend; they have been fished, and there is enough left to stock all the pools in the neighborhood."

"Perhaps your estate at Vallon has been destroyed by an earthquake?"

"No, my friend; on the contrary, the ground was struck by lightning a hundred paces from the château, and a fountain sprung up in a place entirely destitute of water."

"What in the world is the matter, then?"

"The fact is, I have received an invitation for the *fête* at Vaux," said Porthos, with a lugubrious expression.

"Well, do you complain of that? The king has caused a hundred mortal heart-burnings among the courtiers by refusing invitations. And so, my dear friend, you are of the party for Vaux? Bless my soul!"

"Indeed I am!"

"You will see a magnificent sight."

"Alas! I doubt it, though."

"Everything that is grand in France will be brought together there!"

"Ah!" cried Porthos, tearing out a lock of his hair in despair.

"Eh! Good heavens! are you ill?" cried D'Artagnan.

"I am as strong as the Pont-Neuf! It is n't that."

"But what is it, then?"

"It is that I have no clothes!"

D'Artagnan stood petrified. "No clothes, Porthos! no clothes," he cried, "when I see more than fifty suits on the floor!"

"Fifty, yes; but not one that fits me!"

"What! not one that fits you? But are you not measured, then, when you give an order?"

"To be sure, he is," answered Mouston; "but unfortunately I have grown stouter."

"What! you stouter?"

"So much so that I am now bigger than the baron. Would you believe it, Monsieur?"

"*Parbleu!* it seems to me that is quite evident."

"Do you see, stupid?" said Porthos; "that is quite evident!"

"Be still, my dear Porthos!" resumed D'Artagnan, becoming slightly impatient. "I don't understand why your clothes should not fit you because Mouston has grown stouter."

"I am going to explain it," said Porthos. "You remember having related to me the story of the Roman general Antony, who had always seven wild boars, kept roasting, cooked to different degrees, so that he might be able to have his dinner at any time of the day he chose

to ask for it? Well, then, I resolved, as at any time I might be invited to court to spend a week, — I resolved to have always seven suits ready for the occasion.”

“Capitally reasoned, Porthos! Only, a man must have a fortune like yours to gratify such whims. Without counting the time lost in being measured, the fashions are always changing.”

“That is exactly the point,” said Porthos, “in regard to which I flattered myself I had hit on a very ingenious device.”

“Tell me what it is; for I don’t doubt your genius.”

“You remember that Mouston once was thin?”

“Yes; when he was called Mousqueton.”

“And you remember, too, the period when he began to grow fatter?”

“No, not exactly. I beg your pardon, my good Mouston.”

“Oh, you are not in fault, Monsieur!” said Mouston, graciously. “You were in Paris; and as for us, we were in Pierrefonds.”

“Well, well, my dear Porthos; there was a time when Mouston began to grow fat. Is that what you wished to say?”

“Yes, my friend; and I greatly rejoiced over it at that time.”

“Indeed, I believe you did,” exclaimed D’Artagnan.

“You understand,” continued Porthos, “what a world of trouble it spared me.”

“No, my dear friend, I do not yet understand; but perhaps with the help of explanation —”

“Here it is, my friend. In the first place, as you have said, to be measured is a loss of time, even though it occur only once a fortnight. And then, one may be travelling, and may wish to have seven suits always ready. In



short, I have a horror of letting any one take my measure. Confound it! either one is a gentleman or he is not. To be scrutinized and scanned by a fellow who completely analyzes you by inch and line, — 't is degrading. Here, they find you too hollow; there, too prominent. They recognize your strong and weak points. See, now, when we leave the measurer's hands, we are like those strongholds whose angles and different thicknesses have been ascertained by a spy."

"In truth, my dear Porthos, you possess ideas entirely your own."

"Ah! you see, when a man is an engineer —"

"And has fortified Belle-Isle, — 't is natural, my friend."

"Well, I had an idea, which would doubtless have proved a good one but for Mouston's carelessness."

D'Artagnan glanced at Mouston, who replied by a slight movement of his body, as if to say, "You will see whether I am at all to blame in all this."

"I congratulated myself, then," resumed Porthos, "at seeing Mouston get fat; and I did all I could, by means of substantial feeding, to make him stout, — always in the hope that he would come to equal myself in girth, and could then be measured in my stead."

"Ah," cried D'Artagnan, "I see! That spared you both time and humiliation."

"Consider my joy when after a year and a half's judicious feeding, — for I used to feed him myself, — the fellow —"

"Oh, I lent a good hand myself, Monsieur!" said Mouston, humbly.

"That's true. Consider my joy when one morning I perceived Mouston was obliged, like myself, to compress himself to get through the little secret door that those fools of architects had made in the chamber of the late



Madame du Vallon, in the château of Pierrefonds. And, by the way, about that door, my friend, I should like to ask you, who know everything, why these wretches of architects, who ought by rights to have the compasses in their eye, came to make doorways through which nobody but thin people could pass?"

"Oh! those doors," answered D'Artagnan, "were meant for gallants, and they have generally slight and slender figures."

"Madame du Vallon had no gallant!" answered Porthos, majestically.

"Perfectly true, my friend," resumed D'Artagnan; "but the architects were imagining the possibility of your marrying again."

"Ah, that is possible!" said Porthos. "And now that I have received an explanation why doorways are made too narrow, let us return to the subject of Mouston's fatness. But see how the two things fit each other! I have always noticed that ideas run parallel. And so, observe this phenomenon, D'Artagnan! I was talking to you of Mouston, who is fat, and it led us on to Madame du Vallon —"

"Who was thin?"

"Hum! is it not marvellous?"

"My dear friend, a *savant* of my acquaintance, M. Costar, has made the same observation as you have; and he calls the process by some Greek name, which I forget."

"What! my remark is not then original?" cried Porthos, astounded. "I thought I was the discoverer."

"My friend, the fact was known before Aristotle's days, — that is to say, about two thousand years ago."

"Well, well, 't is no less true," remarked Porthos, delighted at the idea of having concurred with the sages of antiquity.

"Wonderfully. But suppose we return to Mouston. It seems to me, we have left him fattening under our very eyes."

"Yes, Monsieur," said Mouston.

"Well," said Porthos, "Mouston fattened so well that he gratified all my hopes by reaching my standard; a fact of which I was well able to convince myself, by seeing the rascal one day in a waistcoat of mine, which he had turned into a coat, — a waistcoat the mere embroidery of which was worth a hundred pistoles."

"'T was only to try it on, Monsieur," said Mouston.

"From that moment I determined to put Mouston in communication with my tailors, and to have him measured instead of myself."

"A capital idea, Porthos; but Mouston is a foot and a half shorter than you."

"Exactly! They measured him down to the ground, and the end of the skirt came just below my knee."

"What a wonder you are, Porthos! Such a thing could happen only to you."

"Ah, yes, pay your compliments; there is something upon which to base them! It was exactly at that time — that is to say, nearly two years and a half ago — that I set out for Belle-Isle, instructing Mouston (so as always to have, in every event, a pattern of every fashion) to have a coat made for himself every month."

"And did Mouston neglect to comply with your instructions? Ah, that would not be right, Mouston!"

"No, Monsieur, quite the contrary, quite the contrary!"

"No, he never forgot to have his coats made; but he forgot to inform me that he had grown stouter!"

"But it was not my fault, Monsieur! Your tailor never told me."

"And this to such an extent, Monsieur," continued

Porthos, "that the fellow in two years has gained eighteen inches in girth, and so my last dozen coats are all too large in progressive measure from a foot to a foot and a half!"

"But the rest, — those which were made when you were of the same size?"

"They are no longer the fashion, my dear friend. Were I to put them on, I should look like a fresh arrival from Siam, and as though I had been two years away from court."

"I understand your difficulty. You have how many new suits? — thirty-six, and yet not one to wear. Well, you must have a thirty-seventh made, and give the thirty-six to Mouston."

"Ah, Monsieur!" said Mouston, with a gratified air. "The truth is, that Monsieur has always been very generous to me."

"Do you mean to think that I had n't that idea, or that I was deterred by the expense? But it wants only two days to the *fête*. I received the invitation yesterday; made Mouston post hither with my wardrobe, and only this morning discovered my misfortune; and from now till the day after to-morrow, there is n't a single fashionable tailor who will undertake to make me a suit."

"That is to say, one covered with gold, is n't it?"

"I especially wish it so!"

"Oh, we shall manage it! You won't leave for three days. The invitations are for Wednesday, and this is only Sunday morning."

"Tis true; but Aramis has strongly advised me to be at Vaux twenty-four hours beforehand."

"How! Aramis?"

"Yes, it was Aramis who brought me the invitation."

"Ah, to be sure, I see! You are invited on the part of M. Fouquet?"

"By no means, — by the king, dear friend. The letter bears the following as large as life : —

'M. le Baron du Vallon is informed that the king has condescended to place him on the invitation list — '

"Very good ; but you leave with M. Fouquet ?"

"And when I think," cried Porthos, stamping on the floor, — "when I think I shall have no clothes, I am ready to burst with rage ! I should like to strangle somebody or destroy something !"

"Neither strangle anybody nor destroy anything, Porthos ; I will manage it all. Put on one of your thirty-six suits, and come with me to a tailor."

"Pooh ! my agent has seen them all this morning."

"Even M. Percerin ?"

"Who is M. Percerin ?"

"He is the king's tailor, *parbleu* !"

"Oh ! ah, yes !" said Porthos, who wished to appear to know the king's tailor, but now heard his name mentioned for the first time ; "to M. Percerin's, by Jove ! I thought he would be too much engaged."

"Doubtless he will be ; but be at ease, Porthos ! He will do for me what he won't do for another. Only, you must allow yourself to be measured !"

"Ah !" said Porthos, with a sigh, "'t is vexatious, but what would you have me do ?"

"Do ? As others do, — as the king does."

"What ! Do they measure the king too ? Does *he* put up with it ?"

"The king is a beau, my good friend ; and so are you, too, whatever you may say about it."

Porthos smiled triumphantly. "Let us go to the king's tailor," he said ; "and since he measures the king, I think, by my faith, I may well allow him to measure me !"

## CHAPTER XXX.

WHO MESSIRE JEAN PERCERIN WAS.

THE king's tailor, Messire Jean Percerin, occupied a rather large house in the Rue St. Honoré, near the Rue de l'Arbre Sec. He was a man of great taste in elegant stuffs, embroideries, and velvet, being hereditary tailor to the king. The preferment of his house reached as far back as the time of Charles IX. ; from whose reign dated, as we know, fancies in *bravery* difficult enough to gratify. The Percerin of that period was a Huguenot, like Ambroise Paré, and had been spared by the Queen of Navarre, — the beautiful Margot, as they used to write and say too in those days, — because, in sooth, he was the only one who could make for her those wonderful riding-habits which she preferred to wear, seeing that they were marvellously well suited to hide certain anatomical defects which the Queen of Navarre used very studiously to conceal. Percerin being saved made, out of gratitude, some beautiful black bodices, very inexpensive indeed, for Queen Catherine, who ended by being pleased at the preservation of a Huguenot on whom she had long looked with aversion. But Percerin was a prudent man ; and having heard it said that there was no more dangerous sign for a Huguenot than to be smiled upon by Catherine, and having observed that her smiles were more frequent than usual, he speedily turned Catholic, with all his family ; and having thus become irreproachable, attained the lofty position of master tailor to the Crown of France.



Under Henry III., gay king as he was, this position was as high as one of the loftiest peaks of the Cordilleras. Now, Percerin had been a clever man all his life, and by way of keeping up his reputation beyond the grave, took very good care not to make a bad death of it ; and so contrived to die very seasonably, — at the very moment he felt his powers of invention declining. He left a son and daughter, both worthy of the name they were called upon to bear, — the son a cutter as unerring and exact as the square rule, the daughter apt at embroidery and at designing ornaments. The marriage of Henry IV. and Marie de Médicis, and the exquisite court mourning for the aforementioned queen, together with a few words let fall by M. de Bassompierre, king of the beaux of that period, made the fortune of the second generation of Percerins. M. Concino Concini, and his wife Galigaï, who subsequently shone at the French Court, sought to Italianize the fashion, and introduced some Florentine tailors ; but Percerin, touched to the quick in his patriotism and his self-esteem, entirely defeated these foreigners by his designs in brocatelle, — so effectually that Concino was the first to give up his compatriots, and held the French tailor in such esteem that he would never employ any other ; and thus wore a doublet of his on the very day that Vitry blew out his brains with his pistol at the Pont du Louvre.

It was that doublet, issuing from M. Percerin's workshop, which the Parisians rejoiced in hacking into so many pieces with the human flesh it covered. Notwithstanding the favor Concino Concini had shown Percerin, the king Louis XIII. had the generosity to bear no malice to his tailor and to retain him in his service. At the time when Louis the Just afforded this great example of equity, Percerin had brought up two sons, one of whom



made his début at the marriage of Anne of Austria, invented that admirable Spanish costume in which Richelieu danced a saraband, made the costumes for the tragedy of "Mirame," and stitched on to Buckingham's mantle those famous pearls which were destined to be scattered on the floors of the Louvre. A man becomes easily illustrious who has made the dresses of M. de Buckingham, M. de Cinq-Mars, Mademoiselle Ninon, M. de Beaufort, and Marion de Lorme. And thus Percerin III. had attained the summit of his glory when his father died.

This same Percerin III., old, famous, and wealthy, yet further dressed Louis XIV. ; and having no son, which was a great cause of sorrow to him, seeing that with himself his dynasty would end, he had brought up several hopeful pupils. He possessed a carriage, a country-house, lackeys the tallest in Paris ; and by special authority from Louis XIV., a pack of hounds. He worked for Messieurs de Lyonne and Letellier, under a sort of patronage ; but, politic man as he was, and versed in State secrets, he never succeeded in fitting M. Colbert. This is beyond explanation ; it is matter for intuition. Great geniuses of every kind live upon unseen, intangible ideas ; they act without themselves knowing why. The great Percerin (for, contrary to the rule of dynasties, it was, above all, the last of the Percerins who deserved the name of Great),—the great Percerin was inspired when he cut a robe for the queen or a coat for the king ; he could invent a mantle for Monsieur, a clock for Madame's stocking ; but in spite of his supreme genius, he could never hit the measure of M. Colbert. "That man," he used often to say, "is beyond my art ; my needle never can hit him off." We need scarcely say that Percerin was M. Fouquet's tailor, and that the superintendent highly esteemed him.

M. Percerin was nearly eighty years old,—nevertheless,

still fresh, and at the same time so dry, the courtiers used to say, that he was positively brittle. His renown and his fortune were great enough for Monsieur the Prince, that king of fops, to take his arm when talking over the fashions ; and for those least eager to pay never to dare to leave their accounts in arrear with him, — for M. Percerin would for the first time make clothes upon credit, but the second never, unless paid for the former order.

It is easy to see that a tailor of such standing, instead of running after customers, would make difficulties about receiving new ones. And so Percerin declined to fit *bourgeois*, or those who had but recently obtained patents of nobility. It was stated, even, that M. de Mazarin, in return for a full suit of ceremonial vestments as cardinal, one fine day slipped letters of nobility into his pocket.

Percerin was endowed with intelligence and wit. He might be called very lively. At eighty years of age he still took with a steady hand the measure of women's waists.

It was to the house of this great lord of tailors that D'Artagnan took the despairing Porthos ; who, as they were going along, said to his friend : "Take care, my good D'Artagnan, not to compromise the dignity of a man such as I am with the arrogance of this Percerin, who will, I expect, be very impertinent ; for I give you notice, my friend, that if he is wanting in respect to me I will chastise him."

"Presented by me," replied D'Artagnan, "you have nothing to fear, even though you were — what you are not."

"Ah ! 't is because —"

"What ! Have you anything against Percerin, Porthos ?"

"I think that I once sent Mouston to a fellow of that name."

"And then ?"

"The fellow refused to supply me."

"Oh, a misunderstanding, no doubt, which 't is pressing to set right! Mouston must have made a mistake."

"Perhaps."

"He has confused the names."

"Possibly. That rascal Mouston never can remember names."

"I will take it all upon myself."

"Very good."

"Stop the carriage, Porthos; here we are!"

"Here! how here? We are at the Halles; and you told me the house was at the corner of the Rue de l'Arbre-Sec."

"'T is true; but look!"

"Well, I do look, and I see —"

"What?"

"*Pardieu!* that we are at the Halles!"

"You do not, I suppose, want our horses to clamber up on the top of the carriage in front of us?"

"No."

"Nor the carriage in front of us to mount on the one in front of it?"

"Still less."

"Nor that the second should be driven over the roofs of the thirty or forty others which have arrived before us?"

"No; you are right, indeed. What a number of people! And what are they all about?"

"'T is very simple, — they are waiting their turn."

"Bah! Have the comedians of the Hôtel de Bourgogne shifted their quarters?"

"No; their turn to obtain an entrance to M. Percerin's house."

"And we are going to wait too?"

"Oh, we shall show ourselves more ready and less proud than they!"

"What are we to do, then?"

"Get down, pass through the footmen and lackeys, and enter the tailor's house, which I will answer for our doing, especially if you go first."

"Come, then," said Porthos.

They both alighted, and made their way on foot towards the establishment. The cause of the confusion was that M. Percerin's doors were closed, while a servant standing before them was explaining to the illustrious customers of the illustrious tailor that just then M. Percerin could not receive anybody. It was bruited about outside still, on the authority of what the great lackey had said confidentially to some great noble whom he favored, that M. Percerin was engaged upon five dresses for the king, and that, owing to the urgency of the case, he was meditating in his office on the ornaments, colors, and cut of these five suits. Some, contented with this reason, went away again, happy to repeat it to others; but others, more tenacious, insisted on having the doors opened, — and among these last, three Blue Ribbons, intended to take part in a ballet which would inevitably fail unless the said three had their costumes shaped by the very hand of the great Percerin himself.

D'Artagnan, pushing on Porthos, who scattered the groups of people right and left, succeeded in gaining the counter behind which the journeymen tailors were doing their best to answer questions. We forgot to mention that at the door they wanted to put off Porthos, like the rest; but D'Artagnan, showing himself, pronounced merely these words, "The king's order," and was let in with his friend. Those poor devils had enough to do, and did their best, to reply to the demands of the

customers in the absence of their master, leaving off drawing a stitch to turn a sentence; and when wounded pride or disappointed expectation brought down upon them too cutting rebukes, he who was attacked made a dive and disappeared under the counter.

The line of discontented lords formed a picture full of curious details. Our captain of Musketeers, a man of sure and rapid observation, took it all in at a glance; but having run over the groups, his eye rested on a man in front of him. This man, seated upon a stool, scarcely showed his head above the counter which sheltered him. He was about forty years of age, with a melancholy aspect, pale face, and soft luminous eyes. He was looking at D'Artagnan and the rest, with his chin resting upon his hand, like a calm and inquiring spectator. Only, on perceiving and doubtless recognizing our captain, he pulled his hat down over his eyes. It was this action, perhaps, that attracted D'Artagnan's attention. If so, the gentleman who had pulled down his hat produced an effect entirely different from what he had desired. In other respects, his costume was plain, and his hair evenly cut enough for customers who were not close observers to take him for a mere tailor's apprentice perched behind the board and carefully stitching cloth or velvet. Nevertheless, this man held up his head too often to be very productively employed with his fingers. D'Artagnan was not deceived, — not he; and he saw at once that if this man was working on anything, it certainly was not on cloth.

"Eh!" said he, addressing this man, "and so you have become a tailor's boy, M. Molière?"

"Hush, M. d'Artagnan!" replied the man, softly; "in Heaven's name! you will make them recognize me."

"Well, and what harm?"

"The fact is, there is no harm; but —"



"You were going to say there is no good in doing it, either, is it not so?"

"Alas! no; for I was occupied in looking at some excellent figures."

"Go on, go on, M. Molière! I quite understand the interest you take in it. I will not disturb your study."

"Thank you."

"But on one condition, — that you tell me where M. Percerin really is."

"Oh, willingly! in his own room. Only —"

"Only that one can't enter it?"

"Unapproachable."

"For everybody?"

"For everybody. He brought me here, so that I might be at my ease to make my observations, and then he went away."

"Well, my dear M. Molière, but you will go and tell him I am here."

"I!" exclaimed Molière, in the tone of a courageous dog from which you snatch the bone it has legitimately gained; "I disturb myself! Ah, M. d'Artagnan, how hard you are upon me!"

"If you don't go directly and tell M. Percerin that I am here, my dear Molière," said D'Artagnan, in a low tone, "I warn you of one thing, — that I won't exhibit to you the friend I have brought with me."

Molière indicated Porthos by an imperceptible gesture. "This gentleman, is it not?"

"Yes."

Molière fixed upon Porthos one of those looks which penetrate the minds and hearts of men. The subject doubtless appeared very promising to him, for he immediately rose and led the way into the adjoining chamber.



## CHAPTER XXXI.

## THE SAMPLES.

DURING all this time the crowd was slowly rolling on, leaving at every angle of the counter either a murmur or a menace, as the waves leave foam or scattered seaweed on the sands, when they retire with the ebbing tide. In about ten minutes Molière reappeared, making another sign to D'Artagnan from under the hangings. The latter hurried after him, with Porthos in the rear, and after threading a labyrinth of corridors, introduced him to M. Percerin's room. The old man, with his sleeves turned up, was gathering up in folds a piece of gold-flowered brocade, so as the better to exhibit its lustre. Perceiving D'Artagnan, he put the silk aside, and came to meet him, by no means radiant and by no means courteous, but on the whole in a tolerably civil manner.

"The captain of the Musketeers will excuse me, I am sure, for I am engaged."

"Eh ! yes, on the king's costumes ; I know that, my dear M. Percerin. You are making three, they tell me."

"Five, my dear monsieur, — five !"

"Three or five, 'tis all the same to me, my dear monsieur ; and I know that you will make them most exquisitely."

"Yes, I know. Once made, they will be the most beautiful in the world, I do not deny it ; but that they may be the most beautiful in the world, they must first be made ; and to do this, Captain, I am pressed for time."

"Oh, bah ! there are two days yet ; 't is much more than you require, M. Percerin," said D'Artagnan, in the coolest possible manner.

Percerin raised his head with the air of a man little accustomed to be contradicted, even in his whims ; but D'Artagnan did not pay the least attention to the airs which the illustrious tailor began to assume.

"My dear M. Percerin," he continued, "I bring you a customer."

"Ah ! ah !" exclaimed Percerin, crossly.

"M. le Baron du Vallon de Bracieux de Pierrefonds," continued D'Artagnan.

Percerin attempted a bow, which found no favor in the eyes of the terrible Porthos, who from his first entry into the room had been regarding the tailor askance.

"A very good friend of mine," concluded D'Artagnan.

"I will attend to Monsieur," said Percerin, "but later."

"Later ? but when ?"

"Why, when I have time."

"You have already told my valet as much," broke in Porthos, discontentedly.

"Very likely," said Percerin ; "I am nearly always pushed for time."

"My friend," returned Porthos, sententiously, "there is always time when one chooses to find it."

Percerin turned crimson, — a very ominous sign indeed in old men blanched by age. "Monsieur," said he, "is very free to confer his custom elsewhere."

"Come, come, Percerin," interposed D'Artagnan, "you are not in a good temper to-day. Well, I will say one more word to you, which will bring you on your knees : Monsieur is not only a friend of mine, but more, — a friend of M. Fouquet."

"Ah ! ah !" exclaimed the tailor, "that is another

thing." Then turning to Porthos, "Monsieur the Baron is attached to the superintendent?" he inquired.

"I am attached to myself," shouted Porthos, at the very moment when the tapestry was raised to introduce a new speaker in the dialogue. Molière was all observation; D'Artagnan laughed; Porthos swore.

"My dear Percerin," said D'Artagnan, "you will make a dress for the baron? 'Tis I who ask you."

"To you I will not say nay, Captain."

"But that is not all; you will make it for him at once."

"'Tis impossible before eight days."

"That, then, is as much as to refuse, because the dress is wanted for the *fête* at Vaux."

"I repeat that it is impossible," returned the obstinate old man.

"By no means, dear M. Percerin, above all if *I* ask you," said a mild voice at the door, — a silvery voice which made D'Artagnan prick up his ears. It was the voice of Aramis.

"M. d'Herblay!" cried the tailor.

"Aramis!" murmured D'Artagnan.

"Ah, our bishop!" said Porthos.

"Good-morning, D'Artagnan; good-morning, Porthos; good-morning, my dear friends," said Aramis. "Come, come, M. Percerin, make the baron's dress, and I will answer for it you will gratify M. Fouquet;" and he accompanied the words with a sign which seemed to say, "Agree, and dismiss them."

It appeared that Aramis had over M. Percerin an influence superior even to D'Artagnan's; for the tailor bowed in assent, and turning round upon Porthos, "Go and get measured on the other side," said he, rudely.

Porthos colored in a formidable manner. D'Artagnan

saw the storm coming, and addressing Molière said to him in an undertone, "You see before you, my dear monsieur, a man who considers himself disgraced if you measure the flesh and bones that Heaven has given him ; study this type for me, Aristophanes, and profit by it."

Molière had no need of encouragement, and his gaze dwelt upon the baron Porthos. "Monsieur," he said, "if you will come with me, I will make them take your measure without the measurer touching you."

"Oh !" said Porthos, "how do you make that out, my friend ?"

"I say that they shall apply neither line nor rule to the seams of your dress. It is a new method we have invented for measuring people of quality, who are too sensitive to allow low-born fellows to touch them. We know some susceptible persons who will not put up with being measured, — a process which, as I think, wounds the natural dignity of man ; and if perchance Monsieur should be one of these —"

"*Corbœuf* ! I believe I am one of them."

"Well, that is a capital coincidence, and you will have the benefit of our invention."

"But how in the devil can it be done ?" asked Porthos, delighted.

"Monsieur," said Molière, bowing, "if you will deign to follow me, you will see."

Aramis observed this scene with all his eyes. Perhaps he fancied from D'Artagnan's liveliness that he would leave with Porthos, so as not to lose the conclusion of a scene so well begun. But, clear-sighted as he was, Aramis deceived himself. Porthos and Molière left together. D'Artagnan remained with Percerin. Why ? From curiosity, doubtless ; probably to enjoy a little longer the society of his good friend Aramis. As Molière and Por-

thos disappeared, D'Artagnan drew near the Bishop of Vannes, — a proceeding which appeared particularly to disconcert him. "A dress for you also, is it not, my friend?"

Aramis smiled. "No," said he.

"You will go to Vaux, however?"

"I shall go, but without a new dress. You forget, dear D'Artagnan, that a poor bishop of Vannes is not rich enough to have new dresses for every *fête*."

"Bah!" said the musketeer, laughing; "and do we write no more poems now, either?"

"Oh, D'Artagnan," exclaimed Aramis, "I have long given over all these follies!"

"True," repeated D'Artagnan, only half convinced.

As for Percerin, he had relapsed into his contemplation of the brocades.

"Don't you perceive," said Aramis, smiling, "that we are greatly boring this good gentleman, my dear D'Artagnan?"

"Ah! ah!" murmured the musketeer, aside; "that is, I am boring you, my friend." Then aloud, "Well, then, let us leave. I have no further business here; and if you are as disengaged as I, Aramis —"

"No; not I — I wished —"

"Ah! you had something private to say to M. Percerin? Why did you not tell me so at once?"

"Something private, certainly," repeated Aramis, "but not from you, D'Artagnan. I hope you will believe that I can never have anything so private to say that a friend like you may not hear it."

"Oh, no, no! I am going," said D'Artagnan, but imparting to his voice an evident tone of curiosity; for Aramis's annoyance, well dissembled as it was, had not escaped him, and he knew that in that impenetrable

mind even the most apparently trivial thing was designed to some end, — an unknown one, but one which from the knowledge he had of his friend's character the musketeer felt must be important.

On his part, Aramis saw that D'Artagnan was not without suspicion, and pressed him. "Stay, by all means!" he said; "this is what it is." Then turning towards the tailor, "My dear Percerin," said he. — "I am even very happy that you are here, D'Artagnan."

"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed the Gascon, for the third time, even less deceived this time than before.

Percerin never moved. Aramis roused him violently, by snatching from his hands the stuff upon which he was engaged. "My dear Percerin," said he, "I have near at hand M. Lebrun, one of M. Fouquet's painters."

"Ah, very good!" thought D'Artagnan; "but why Lebrun?"

Aramis looked at D'Artagnan, who seemed to be occupied with an engraving of Mark Antony. "And you wish to have made for him a dress similar to those of the Epicureans?" answered Percerin; and while saying this in an absent manner, the worthy tailor endeavored to recapture his piece of brocade.

"An Epicurean's dress?" asked D'Artagnan, in a tone of inquiry.

"I see," said Aramis, with a most engaging smile; "it is written that our dear D'Artagnan shall know all our secrets this evening. Yes, my friend, you have surely heard speak of M. Fouquet's Epicureans, have you not?"

"Undoubtedly. Is it not a kind of poetical society, of which La Fontaine, Loret, Pellisson, and Molière are members, and which holds its sittings at St. Mandé?"

"Exactly so. Well, we are going to put our poets in uniform, and enroll them in the service of the king."



"Oh, very well ! I understand, — a surprise M. Fouquet is getting up for the king. Be at ease ; if that is the secret about M. Lebrun, I will not mention it."

"Always agreeable, my friend ! No, M. Lebrun has nothing to do with this part of it ; the secret which concerns him is far more important than the other."

"Then, if it is so important as all that, I prefer not to know it," said D'Artagnan, making a show of departure.

"Come in, M. Lebrun, come in !" said Aramis, opening a side-door with his right hand and holding back D'Artagnan with his left.

"I' faith, I too am quite in the dark," quoth Percerin.

Aramis took an "opportunity," as is said in theatrical matters. "My dear M. Percerin," he continued, "you are making five dresses for the king, are you not ? — one in brocade, one in hunting-cloth, one in velvet, one in satin, and one in Florentine stuffs ?"

"Yes ; but how do you know all that, Monseigneur ?" said Percerin, astounded.

"It is all very simple, my dear monsieur. There will be a hunt, a banquet, a concert, a promenade, and a reception ; these five kinds of dress are required by etiquette."

"You know everything, Monseigneur !"

"And a great many more things too," murmured D'Artagnan.

"But," cried the tailor, in triumph, "what you do not know, Monseigneur, prince of the church though you are ; what nobody will know ; what only the king, Mademoiselle de la Vallière, and myself do know, — is the color of the materials, the nature of the ornaments, and the cut, the *ensemble*, the finish of it all !"

"Well," said Aramis, "that is precisely what I have come to ask you, dear Percerin."

"Ah, bah !" exclaimed the tailor, terrified, though

Aramis had pronounced these words in his sweetest and most honeyed voice. The request appeared, on reflection, so exaggerated, so ridiculous, so monstrous to M. Percerin that first he laughed to himself, then aloud, and finished with a shout. D'Artagnan followed his example, not because he found the matter so "very funny," but in order not to allow Aramis to cool.

Aramis suffered them to laugh, and then, when they had become quiet, "At first view," said he, "I appear to be hazarding an absurd question, do I not? But D'Artagnan, who is incarnate wisdom itself, will tell you that I could not do otherwise than ask you this."

"Let us see," said the attentive musketeer, perceiving with his wonderful instinct that they had only been skirmishing till now, and that the moment of battle was approaching.

"Let us see," said Percerin, incredulously.

"Why, now," continued Aramis, "does M. Fouquet give the king a *fête*? Is it not to please him?"

"Assuredly," said Percerin.

D'Artagnan nodded assent.

"By delicate attentions, by some happy device, by a succession of surprises, like that of which we were talking, — the enrolment of our Epicureans?"

"Admirable."

"Well, then, this is the surprise we intend, my good friend. M. Lebrun, here, is a man who draws most exactly."

"Yes," said Percerin; "I have seen his pictures, and observed that the dresses were highly elaborated. That is why I at once agreed to make him a costume, — whether one to agree with those of the Epicureans, or an original one."

"My dear monsieur, we accept your offer, and shall

presently avail ourselves of it; but just now M. Lebrun is not in want of the dresses you will make for himself, but of those you are making for the king."

Percerin made a bound backwards, which D'Artagnan, calmest and most appreciative of men, did not consider overdone, — so many strange and startling aspects wore the proposal which Aramis had just hazarded. "The king's dresses! Give the king's dresses to any mortal whatever! Oh, for once, Monseigneur, your Grace is mad!" cried the poor tailor, in extremity.

"Help me now, D'Artagnan," said Aramis, more and more calm and smiling. "Help me now to persuade Monsieur; for *you* understand, do you not?"

"Eh! eh! — not exactly, I declare."

"What! you do not understand that M. Fouquet wishes to afford the king the surprise of finding his portrait on his arrival at Vaux; and that the portrait, which will be a striking resemblance, ought to be dressed exactly as the king will be on the day it is shown?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" said the musketeer, nearly convinced, so plausible was this reasoning. "Yes, my dear Aramis, you are right; it is a happy idea. I will wager it is one of your own, Aramis."

"Well, I don't know," replied the bishop; "either mine or M. Fouquet's." Then scanning Percerin, after noticing D'Artagnan's hesitation, "Well, M. Percerin," he asked, "what do you say to this?"

"I say that —"

"That you are, doubtless, free to refuse. I know well, — and I by no means count upon compelling you, my dear monsieur. I will say more; I even understand all the delicacy you feel in taking up with M. Fouquet's idea, — you dread appearing to flatter the king. A noble spirit, M. Percerin, a noble spirit!" The tailor stammered. "It

would indeed be a very pretty compliment to pay the young prince," continued Aramis; "but as the superintendent told me, 'If Percerin refuse, tell him that it will not at all lower him in my opinion, and I shall always esteem him; only —'"

"Only?" repeated Percerin, rather troubled.

"'Only,'" continued Aramis, "'I shall be compelled to say to the king,' — you understand, my dear M. Percerin, that these are M. Fouquet's words, — 'I shall be constrained to say to the king, "Sire, I had intended to present your Majesty with your portrait; but owing to a feeling of delicacy, exaggerated perhaps, but creditable, M. Percerin opposed the project."'"

"Opposed!" cried the tailor, terrified at the responsibility which would weigh upon him; "I to oppose the desire, the will of M. Fouquet when he is seeking to please the king! Oh, what a hateful word you have uttered, Monseigneur! Oppose! Oh, 't is not I who said it, thank God! I call the captain of the Musketeers to witness it! Is it not true, M. d'Artagnan, that I have opposed nothing?"

D'Artagnan made a sign indicating that he wished to remain neutral. He felt that there was an intrigue at the bottom of it, whether comedy or tragedy; he was disgusted at not being able to fathom it, but in the mean while wished to keep clear.

But already Percerin, goaded by the idea that the king should be told he had stood in the way of a pleasant surprise, had offered Lebrun a chair, and proceeded to bring from a wardrobe four magnificent dresses, the fifth being still in the workmen's hands; and these masterpieces he successively fitted upon four lay figures, which imported into France in the time of Concini had been given to Percerin II. by Maréchal d'Ancre after the discomfiture

of the Italian tailors ruined in their competition. The painter set to work to draw and then to paint the dresses. But Aramis, who was closely watching all the phases of his toil, suddenly stopped him.

"I think you have not quite got it, my dear Lebrun," he said; "your colors will deceive you, and on canvas we shall lack that exact resemblance which is absolutely requisite. Time is necessary for attentively observing the finer shades."

"Quite true," said Percerin; "but time is wanting, and on that head you will agree with me, Monseigneur, I can do nothing."

"Then the affair will fail," said Aramis, quietly, "and that because of a want of precision in the colors."

Nevertheless, Lebrun went on copying the materials and ornaments with the closest fidelity, — a process which Aramis watched with ill-concealed impatience.

"What in the devil, now, is the meaning of this imbroglio?" the musketeer kept saying to himself.

"That will certainly never do," said Aramis. "M. Lebrun, close your box, and roll up your canvas."

"But, Monsieur," cried the vexed painter, "the light is abominable here."

"An idea, M. Lebrun, an idea! If we had a sample of the materials, for example, and with time and a better light —"

"Oh, then," cried Lebrun, "I would answer for the effect!"

"Good!" said D'Artagnan, "this ought to be the knot of the whole thing; they want a sample of each of the materials. *Mordieux!* will this Percerin give it now?"

Percerin, beaten in his last retreat, and duped moreover by the feigned good-nature of Aramis, cut out five samples and handed them to the Bishop of Vannes.

"I like this better. That is your opinion, is it not?" said Aramis to D'Artagnan.

"My dear Aramis," said D'Artagnan, "my opinion is that you are always the same."

"And, consequently, always your friend," said the bishop, in a charming tone.

"Yes, yes," said D'Artagnan, aloud; then, in a low voice, "If I am your dupe, double Jesuit that you are, I will not be your accomplice; and to prevent it, 't is time I left this place. Adieu, Aramis," he added, aloud, "adieu; I am going to rejoin Porthos."

"Then wait for me," said Aramis, pocketing the samples; "for I have done, and shall not be sorry to say a parting word to our friend."

Lebrun packed up, Percerin put back the dresses into the closet, Aramis put his hand on his pocket to assure himself that the samples were secure, and they all left the study.



## CHAPTER XXXII.

WHERE, PROBABLY, MOLIÈRE FORMED HIS FIRST IDEA OF THE "BOURGEOIS GENTILHOMME."

D'ARTAGNAN found Porthos in the adjoining chamber; but no longer an irritated Porthos, or a disappointed Porthos, but Porthos radiant, blooming, fascinating, and chatting with Molière, who was looking upon him with a species of idolatry, and as a man would who had not only never seen anything better, but not even ever anything so good. Aramis went straight up to Porthos and offered him his delicate white hand, which lost itself in the gigantic hand of his old friend, — an operation which Aramis never hazarded without a certain uneasiness. But the friendly pressure having been performed not too painfully for him, the Bishop of Vannes passed over to Molière.

"Well, Monsieur," said he, "will you come with me to St. Mandé?"

"I will go anywhere you like, Monseigneur," answered Molière.

"To St. Mandé!" cried Porthos, surprised at seeing the proud bishop of Vannes fraternizing with a journeyman tailor. "What! Aramis, are you going to take this gentleman to St. Mandé?"

"Yes," said Aramis, smiling; "our work is pressing."

"Besides, my dear Porthos," continued D'Artagnan, "M. Molière is not altogether what he seems."

"In what way?" asked Porthos.

"Why, this gentleman is one of M. Percerin's chief clerks, and he is expected at St. Mandé to try on the dresses which M. Fouquet has ordered for the Epicureans."

"T is precisely so," said Molière ; "yes, Monsieur."

"Come, then, my dear M. Molière," said Aramis ; "that is, if you have done with M. du Vallon ?"

"We have finished," replied Porthos.

"And you are satisfied ?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Completely so," replied Porthos.

Molière took his leave of Porthos with much ceremony, and grasped the hand which the captain of the Musketeers furtively offered him.

"Pray, Monsieur," concluded Porthos, mincingly, "above all, be exact."

"You will have your dress after to-morrow, Monsieur the Baron," answered Molière ; and he left with Aramis.

D'Artagnan, taking Porthos's arm, inquired, "What has this tailor done for you, my dear Porthos, that you are so pleased with him ?"

"What has he done for me, my friend, — done for me !" cried Porthos, enthusiastically.

"Yes, I ask you, what has he done for you ?"

"My friend, he has done that which no tailor ever yet accomplished, — he has taken my measure without touching me !"

"Ah, bah ! tell me how he did it !"

"First, then, they went, I don't know where, for a number of lay figures, of all heights and sizes, hoping there would be one to suit mine ; but the largest — that of the drum-major of the Swiss Guard — was two inches too short, and half a foot too slender."

"Indeed !"

"It is exactly as I tell you, D'Artagnan ; but he is a

great man, or at the very least a great tailor, is this M. Molière. He was not at all put at fault by the circumstance."

"What did he do, then?"

"Oh, it is a very simple matter! I' faith, 't is an unheard of thing that people should have been so stupid as not to have discovered this method from the first. What annoyance and humiliation they would have spared me!"

"Not to speak of the dresses, my dear Porthos."

"Yes, thirty dresses."

"Well, my dear Porthos, tell me M. Molière's plan."

"Molière? You call him so, do you? I shall make a point of recollecting his name."

"Yes; or Poquelin, if you prefer that."

"No; I like Molière best. When I wish to recollect his name, I shall think of *volière* [an aviary]; and as I have one at Pierrefonds —"

"Capital!" returned D'Artagnan; "and M. Molière's plan?"

"'T is this: instead of pulling me to pieces, as all these rascals do, making me bend in my back, and double my joints, — all of them low and dishonorable practices —"

D'Artagnan made a sign of approbation with his head. "'Monsieur,' he said to me," continued Porthos, "'a gentleman ought to measure himself. Do me the pleasure to draw near this glass;' and I drew near the glass. I must own I did not exactly understand what this good M. Volière wanted with me —"

"Molière."

"Ah, yes; Molière, Molière. And as the fear of being measured still possessed me, 'Take care,' said I to him, 'what you are going to do with me; I am very ticklish, I warn you!' But he, with his soft voice (for he is a courteous fellow, we must admit, my friend), — he, with his soft

voice, said : ‘ Monsieur, that your dress may fit you well, it must be made according to your figure. Your figure is exactly reflected in this mirror. We shall take the measure of this reflection.’ ”

“ In fact,” said D’Artagnan, “ you saw yourself in the glass ; but where did they find one in which you could see your whole figure ? ”

“ My good friend, it is the very glass in which the king sees himself.”

“ Yes ; but the king is a foot and a half shorter than you are.”

“ Ah ! well, I know not how that may be, — it would no doubt be a way of flattering the king, — but the looking-glass was too large for me. ’T is true that its height was made up of three Venetian plates of glass, placed one above another, and its breadth of the three similar pieces in juxtaposition.”

“ Oh, Porthos, what excellent words you have at your command ! Where in the world did you make the collection ? ”

“ At Belle-Isle. Aramis explained them to the architect.”

“ Ah, very good ! Let us return to the glass, my friend.”

“ Then this good M. Volière — ”

“ Molière.”

“ Yes ; Molière, — you are right. You will see now my dear friend, that I shall recollect his name too well. This excellent M. Molière set to work tracing out lines on the mirror with a piece of Spanish chalk, following throughout the shape of my arms and my shoulders, all the while expounding this maxim, which I thought admirable, — ‘ It is necessary that a dress should not incommode its wearer.’ ”

“ In reality,” said D’Artagnan, “ that is an excellent

maxim, which is, unfortunately, seldom carried out in practice."

"That is why I found it all the more astonishing when he expatiated upon it."

"Ah! he expatiated?"

"*Parbleu!*"

"Let me hear his theory."

"‘Seeing that,’ he continued, ‘one may in awkward circumstances or in a troublesome position have one’s doublet on one’s shoulder, and not desire to take it off —’"

"True," said D’Artagnan.

"‘And so,’ continued M. Volière —"

"Molière."

"Molière; yes. ‘And so,’ went on M. Molière, ‘you want to draw your sword, Monsieur, and you have your doublet on your back. What do you do?’ ‘I take it off,’ I answered. ‘Well, no,’ he replied. ‘How “no”?’ ‘I say that the dress should be so well made that it can in no way encumber you, even in drawing your sword.’ ‘Ah, ah! Put yourself on guard!’ pursued he. I did it with such wondrous firmness that two panes of glass burst out of the window. ‘’T is nothing, nothing,’ said he; ‘keep your position.’ I raised my left arm in the air, the forearm gracefully bent, the ruffle drooping, and my wrist curved, while my right arm, half extended, securely covered my waist with the elbow, and my breast with the wrist."

"Yes," said D’Artagnan, "'t is the true guard, — the academic guard."

"You have said the very word, dear friend. In the mean while Volière —"

"Molière."

"Hold! I should certainly, after all, prefer to call him — What did you say his other name was?"

"Poquelin."

"I prefer to call him Poquelin."

"And how will you remember this name better than the other?"

"You understand — He calls himself Poquelin, does he not?"

"Yes."

"I shall recall to mind Madame Coquenard."

"Good!"

"I shall change *Coq* into *Poq*, *nard* into *lin*; and instead of *Coquenard* I shall have *Poquelin*."

"T is wonderful!" cried D'Artagnan, astounded. "Go on, my friend! I am listening to you with admiration."

"This Coquelin sketched my arm on the glass —"

"I beg your pardon, — Poquelin."

"What did I say, then?"

"You said 'Coquelin.'"

"Ah, true! This Poquelin, then, sketched my arm on the glass; but he took his time over it, — he kept looking at me a good deal. The fact is, that I was very handsome. 'Does it weary you?' he asked. 'A little,' I replied, bending a little in my hands; 'but I could yet hold out an hour.' 'No, no; I will not allow it. We have here some willing fellows who will make it a duty to support your arms, as, of old, men supported those of the prophet.' 'Very good,' I answered. 'That will not be humiliating to you?' 'My friend,' said I, 'there is, I think, a great difference between being supported and being measured.'"

"The distinction is full of sense," interrupted the captain.

"Then," continued Porthos, "he made a sign. Two lads approached: one supported my left arm; while the other, with infinite address, supported my right arm.



‘Another man!’ cried he. A third approached. ‘Support Monsieur by the waist,’ said he. The *garçon* complied.”

“So that you were at rest?” asked D’Artagnan.

“Perfectly; and Poquenard drew me on the glass.”

“Poquelin, my friend.”

“Poquelin, — you are right. Stay! decidedly I prefer calling him Volière.”

“Yes; and then it was over, was n’t it?”

“During that time Volière drew me on the mirror.”

“’T was delicate in him.”

“I much like the plan: it is respectful, and keeps every one in his place.”

“And there it ended?”

“Without a soul having touched me, my friend.”

“Except the three *garçons* who supported you.”

“Doubtless; but I have, I think, already explained to you the difference there is between supporting and measuring.”

“’T is true,” answered D’Artagnan, who said afterwards to himself, “I’ faith, I greatly deceive myself, or I have been the means of a good windfall to that rascal Molière, and we shall assuredly see the scene hit off to the life in some comedy or other.”

Porthos smiled.

“What are you laughing at?” asked D’Artagnan.

“Must I confess it? Well, I was laughing over my good fortune.”

“Oh, that is true; I don’t know a happier man than you. But what is this last piece of luck that has befallen you?”

“Well, my dear fellow, congratulate me.”

“I desire nothing better.”

“It seems I am the first who has had his measure taken in that manner.”

“Are you sure of it?”

“Nearly so. Certain signs of intelligence which passed between Volière and the other *garçons* showed me the fact.”

“Well, my friend, that does not surprise me from Molière,” said D’Artagnan.

“Volière, my friend.”

“Oh, no, no, indeed! I am very willing to leave you to say Volière; but I myself shall continue to say Molière. Well, this, I was saying, does not surprise me, coming from Molière, who is a very ingenious fellow, and whom you inspired with this grand idea.”

“It will be of great use to him by and by, I am sure.”

“Won’t it be of use to him, indeed! I believe you, it will, and not a little so; for you see my friend Molière is of all known tailors the man who best clothes our barons, counts, and marquises — according to their measure.”

On this observation, neither the application nor the depth of which shall we discuss, D’Artagnan and Porthos quitted M. Percerin’s house and rejoined their carriage, wherein we will leave them in order to look after Molière and Aramis at St. Mandé.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

## THE BEEHIVE, THE BEES, AND THE HONEY.

THE Bishop of Vannes, much annoyed at having met D'Artagnan at M. Percerin's, returned to St. Mandé in no very good humor. Molière, on the other hand, quite delighted at having made such a capital rough sketch, and at knowing where to find its original again whenever he should desire to convert his sketch into a picture, arrived in the merriest of moods. All the first story of the left wing was occupied by the most celebrated Epicureans in Paris, and those on the freest footing in the house, — every one in his compartment, like the bees in their cells, employed in producing the honey intended for that royal cake which M. Fouquet proposed to offer his Majesty Louis XIV. during the *fête* at Vaux. Pellisson, his head leaning on his hand, was engaged in drawing out the plan of the prologue to “*Les Fâcheux*,” a comedy in three acts, which was to be put on the stage by Poquelin de Molière, as D'Artagnan called him, or Coquelin de Volière, as Porthos styled him. Loret, with all the charming innocence of a journalist, — the journalists of all ages have always been so artless! — Loret was composing an account of the *fêtes* of Vaux, before those *fêtes* had taken place. La Fontaine sauntered about among them, — a wandering, absent-minded, boring, unbearable shade, buzzing and humming at everybody's shoulder a thousand poetic inanities. He so often disturbed Pellisson, that the latter, raising his head, crossly said, “At least, La Fontaine, supply me

with a rhyme, since you say you have the run of the gardens at Parnassus."

"What rhyme do you want?" asked the *Fabler*, as Madame de Sévigné used to call him.

"I want a rhyme to *lumière*."

"*Ornière*," answered La Fontaine.

"Ah, but my good friend, one cannot talk of *wheel-ruts* when celebrating the delights of Vaux," said Loret.

"Besides, it does n't rhyme," answered Pellisson.

"How! does n't rhyme?" cried La Fontaine, in surprise.

"Yes; you have an abominable habit, my friend, — a habit which will ever prevent your becoming a poet of the first order. You rhyme in a slovenly manner."

"Oh! oh! you think so, do you, Pellisson?"

"Yes, I do, indeed. Remember that a rhyme is never good so long as one can find a better."

"Then I will never write anything again but in prose," said La Fontaine, who had taken up Pellisson's reproach in earnest. "Ah, I often suspected I was nothing but a rascally poet! Yes, 't is the very truth."

"Do not say so; your remark is too sweeping, and there is much that is good in your '*Fables*.'"

"And to begin," continued La Fontaine, following up his idea, "I will go and burn a hundred verses I have just made."

"Where are your verses?"

"In my head."

"Well, if they are in your head you cannot burn them."

"True," said La Fontaine; "but if I do not burn them —"

"Well, what will happen if you do not burn them?"

"They will remain in my mind, and I shall never forget them."

"The devil!" cried Loret; "what a dangerous thing! One would go mad with it!"

"The devil, devil, devil!" repeated La Fontaine; "what can I do?"

"I have discovered the way," said Molière, who had entered during the last words of the conversation.

"What way?"

"Write them first and burn them afterwards."

"How simple it is! Well, I should never have discovered that. What a mind that devil Molière has!" said La Fontaine. Then, striking his forehead, "Oh, thou wilt never be aught but an ass, Jean la Fontaine!" he added.

"What are you saying there, my friend?" broke in Molière, approaching the poet, whose aside he had heard.

"I say I shall never be aught but an ass," answered La Fontaine, with a heavy sigh and swimming eyes. "Yes, my friend," he added, with increasing grief, "it seems that I rhyme in a slovenly manner."

"That is wrong."

"You see! I am a puppy!"

"Who said so?"

"*Parbleu!* 't was Pellisson; did you not, Pellisson?"

Pellisson, again lost in his work, took good care not to answer.

"But if Pellisson said you were a puppy," cried Molière, "Pellisson has gravely insulted you."

"Do you think so?"

"Ah! I advise you, as you are a gentleman, not to leave an insult like that unpunished."

"Oh!" exclaimed La Fontaine.

"Did you ever fight?"

"Once only, with a lieutenant in the light horse."

"What wrong had he done you?"

"It seems he was my wife's lover."

"Ah! ah!" said Molière, becoming slightly pale; but as at La Fontaine's declaration the others had turned round, Molière kept upon his lips the rallying smile which had so nearly died away, and continued to make La Fontaine speak, — "and what was the result of the duel?"

"The result was, that on the ground my opponent disarmed me, and then made an apology, promising never again to set foot in my house."

"And you considered yourself satisfied?" said Molière.

"Not at all! on the contrary, I picked up my sword. 'I beg your pardon, Monsieur,' I said; 'I have not fought you because you were my wife's lover, but because I was told I ought to fight. Now, since I have never known any peace save since you made her acquaintance, do me the pleasure to continue your visits as heretofore, or, *morbleu!* let us set to again.' And so," continued La Fontaine, "he was compelled to resume his relations with Madame, and I continue to be the happiest of husbands."

All burst out laughing. Molière alone passed his hand across his eyes. Why? Perhaps to wipe away a tear, perhaps to smother a sigh. Alas! we know that Molière was a moralist, but he was not a philosopher. "It is all the same," he said, returning to the topic of the conversation, "Pellisson has insulted you."

"Ah, truly! I had already forgotten it."

"And I am going to challenge him on your behalf."

"Well, you can do so, if you think it indispensable."

"I do think it indispensable, and I am going —"

"Stay!" exclaimed La Fontaine; "I want your advice."

"Upon what? — this insult?"

"No; tell me really now whether *lumière* does not rhyme with *ornière*."



"I should make them rhyme."

"Ah! I knew you would."

"And I have made a hundred thousand such rhymes in my time."

"A hundred thousand!" cried La Fontaine; "four times as many as in 'La Pucelle,' which M. Chapelain is meditating. Is it also on this subject that you have composed a hundred thousand verses?"

"Listen to me, you eternally absent-minded creature!" said Molière.

"It is certain," continued La Fontaine, "that *légume*, for instance, rhymes with *posthume*."

"In the plural, especially."

"Yes, especially in the plural, seeing that then it rhymes not with three letters, but with four; as *ornière* does with *lumière*. Put *ornières* and *lumières* in the plural, my dear Pellisson," said La Fontaine, clapping his hand on the shoulder of his friend, whose insult he had quite forgotten, "and they will rhyme."

"Hem!" cried Pellisson.

"Molière says so, and Molière is a judge of it; he declares he has himself made a hundred thousand verses."

"Come," said Molière, laughing, "he is off now."

"It is like *rivage*, which rhymes admirably with *herbage*; I would take my oath of it."

"But —" said Molière.

"I tell you all this," continued La Fontaine, "because you are preparing an entertainment for Vaux, are you not?"

"Yes, — 'Les Fâcheux.'"

"Ah, yes, — 'Les Fâcheux;' yes, I recollect. Well, I was thinking a prologue would admirably suit your entertainment."

"Doubtless it would suit capitally."

"Ah! you are of my opinion?"

"So much so, that I asked you to write this prologue."

"You asked me to write it?"

"Yes, you; and on your refusal begged you to ask Pellisson, who is engaged upon it at this moment."

"Ah! that is what Pellisson is doing, then? I' faith, my dear Molière, you speak with very good sense sometimes."

"When?"

"When you call me absent-minded. It is a wretched defect. I will cure myself of it, and I am going to write your prologue for you."

"But seeing that Pellisson is about it —"

"Ah, true! Double rascal that I am! Loret was indeed right in saying I was a puppy."

"It was not Loret who said so, my friend."

"Well, then, whoever said so, 't is the same to me! And so your entertainment is called 'Les Fâcheux?' Well, can you not make *heureux* rhyme with *fâcheux*?"

"If obliged, yes."

"And even with *capricieux*."

"Oh, no, no!"

"It would be hazardous, and yet why so?"

"There is too great a difference in the cadences."

"I was fancying," said La Fontaine, leaving Molière for Loret, — "I was fancying —"

"What were you fancying?" said Loret, in the middle of a sentence. "Make haste!"

"You are writing the prologue to 'Les Fâcheux,' are you not?"

"No, *mordieu*! it is Pellisson."

"Ah, Pellisson!" cried La Fontaine, going over to him. "I was fancying," he continued, "that the nymph of Vaux —"

"Ah, beautiful!" cried Loret. "The nymph of Vaux! Thank you, La Fontaine; you have just given me the two concluding verses of my paper, —

Et l'on vit la nymphe de Vaux  
Donner le prix à leurs travaux."

"Good! That is something like a rhyme," said Pellisson. "If you could rhyme like that, La Fontaine —"

"But it seems I do rhyme like that, since Loret says it is I who gave him the two lines he has just read."

"Well, if you can rhyme so well, La Fontaine," said Pellisson, "tell me now in what way you would begin my prologue?"

"I should say for instance, *O nymphe — qui —* After *qui* I should place a verb in the second person plural of the present indicative, and should go on thus: *cette grotte profonde.*"

"But the verb, the verb?" asked Pellisson.

"*Pour venir admirer le plus grand roi du monde,*" continued La Fontaine.

"But the verb, the verb?" obstinately insisted Pellisson. "This second person plural of the present indicative?"

"Well, then; *quittez,* —

O nymphe qui quittez cette grotte profonde  
Pour venir admirer le plus grand roi du monde."

"You would put *qui quittez*, would you?"

"Why not?"

"*Qui — qui!*"

"Ah, my dear fellow," exclaimed La Fontaine, "you are a shocking pedant!"

"Without counting," said Molière, "that in the second verse *venir admirer* is very weak, my dear La Fontaine."

"Then you see clearly that I am nothing but a poor creature, — a puppy, as you said."

"I never said so."

"Then, as Loret said."

"And it was not Loret, either ; it was Pellisson."

"Well, Pellisson was right a hundred times over. But what annoys me more than anything, my dear Molière, is that I fear we shall not have our Epicurean dresses."

"You expected yours, then, for the *fête* ?"

"Yes, for the *fête*, and then for after the *fête*. My housekeeper told me that my own is rather faded."

"The devil ! your housekeeper is right, — rather more than faded !"

"Ah, you see," resumed La Fontaine ; "the fact is, I left it on the floor in my room, and my cat —"

"Well, your cat —"

"She kittened upon it, which has rather altered its color."

Molière burst out laughing ; Pellisson and Loret followed his example.

At this juncture the Bishop of Vannes appeared, with a roll of plans and parchments under his arm. As if the angel of death had chilled all gay and sprightly fancies, as if that wan form had scared away the Graces to whom Xenocrates sacrificed, silence immediately reigned through the study, and every one resumed his self-possession and his pen.

Aramis distributed the notes of invitation, and thanked them in the name of M. Fouquet. "The superintendent," he said, "being kept to his room by business, could not come to see them, but begged them to send him some of the fruits of their day's work, to enable him to forget the fatigue of his labor in the night."

At these words, all settled to work. La Fontaine placed himself at a table, and set his rapid pen running over the vellum ; Pellisson made a fair copy of his pro-

logue ; Molière gave fifty fresh verses, with which his visit to Percerin had inspired him ; Loret, his article on the marvellous *fêtes* he predicted ; and Aramis, laden with booty like the king of the bees, — that great black drone, decked with purple and gold, — re-entered his apartment, silent and busy. But before departing, “Remember, gentlemen,” said he, “we all leave to-morrow evening.”

“In that case I must give notice at home,” said Molière.

“Yes ; poor Molière !” said Loret, smiling, — “he loves his home.”

“‘*He* loves,’ yes,” replied Molière, with his sad, sweet smile. “‘He loves,’ — that does not mean, they love *him*.”

“As for me,” said La Fontaine, “they love me at Château Thierry, I am very sure.”

Aramis here re-entered, after a brief disappearance. “Will any one go with me ?” he asked. “I am going by way of Paris, after having passed a quarter of an hour with M. Fouquet. I offer my carriage.”

“Good !” said Molière. “I accept it ; I am in a hurry.”

“I shall dine here,” said Loret. “M. de Gourville has promised me some crawfish, —

Il m’a promis des écrevisses —

Find a rhyme for that, La Fontaine.”

Aramis went out laughing, as only he could laugh, and Molière followed him. They were at the bottom of the stairs, when La Fontaine opened the door and shouted out, —

“Moyennant que tu l’écrivisses,  
Il t’a promis des écrevisses.”

The shouts of laughter reached the ears of Fouquet at the moment Aramis opened the door of the study. As to Molière, he had undertaken to order the horses, while

Aramis went to exchange a parting word with the superintendent. "Oh, how they are laughing there!" said Fouquet, with a sigh.

"And do you not laugh, Monseigneur?"

"I laugh no longer now, M. d'Herblay. The *fête* is approaching; money is departing."

"Have I not told you that was my business?"

"Yes; you promised me millions."

"You shall have them the day after the king's *entrée* into Vaux."

Fouquet looked closely at Aramis, and passed his icy hand across his moistened brow. Aramis perceived that the superintendent either doubted him, or felt that he was powerless to obtain the money. How could Fouquet suppose that a poor bishop, ex-abbé, ex-musketeer, could procure it?

"Why doubt me?" said Aramis.

Fouquet smiled and shook his head.

"Man of little faith!" added the bishop.

"My dear M. d'Herblay," answered Fouquet, "if I fall —"

"Well, if you 'fall' —"

"I shall at least fall from such a height that I shall shatter myself in falling." Then giving himself a shake, as though to escape from himself, "Whence come you," said he, "my friend?"

"From Paris, — from Percerin."

"And what have you been doing at Percerin's, — for I suppose you attach no great importance to our poets' dresses?"

"No; I went to prepare a surprise."

"Surprise?"

"Yes; which you are to give to the king."

"And will it cost much?"



"Oh, a hundred pistoles you will give Lebrun!"

"A painting? Ah, all the better! And what is this painting to represent?"

"I will tell you. Then at the same time, whatever you may say of it, I went to see the dresses for our poets."

"Bah! and they will be rich and elegant?"

"Splendid! There will be few great monseigneurs with dresses so good. People will see the difference between the courtiers of wealth and those of friendship."

"Ever generous and graceful, dear prelate!"

"In your school."

Fouquet grasped his hand. "And where are you going?" he said.

"I am off to Paris, when you shall have given me a certain letter."

"For whom?"

"M. de Lyonne."

"And what do you want with Lyonne?"

"I wish to make him sign a *lettre de cachet*."

"*Lettre de cachet*! Do you desire to put somebody in the Bastille?"

"On the contrary, — to let somebody out."

"And who?"

"A poor devil, — a youth, a lad who has been imprisoned these ten years, for two Latin verses he made against the Jesuits."

"'Two Latin verses!' and for 'two Latin verses' the miserable being has been in prison for ten years?"

"Yes."

"And has committed no other crime?"

"Beyond this, he is as innocent as you or I."

"On your word?"

"On my honor!"

"And his name is —"

“Seldon.”

“Oh, that is too cruel ! You knew this, and you never told me !”

“’T was only yesterday his mother applied to me, Monseigneur.”

“And the woman is poor ?”

“In the deepest misery.”

“Oh, God !” said Fouquet, “thou dost sometimes bear with such injustice on earth that I understand why there are wretches who doubt thy existence ! Stay, M. d’Herblay !” and Fouquet, taking a pen, wrote a few rapid lines to his colleague Lyonne.

Aramis took the letter, and made ready to go.

“Wait !” said Fouquet. He opened his drawer, and took out ten government notes which were there, each for a thousand livres. “Stay !” he said. “Set the son at liberty, and give this to the mother ; but, above all, tell her not —”

“What, Monseigneur ?”

“That she is ten thousand livres richer than I. She would say I am but a poor superintendent ! Go ; and I hope that God will bless those who are mindful of his poor !”

“So also do I hope,” replied Aramis, kissing Fouquet’s hand. And he went out quickly, carrying off the letter for Lyonne and the notes for Seldon’s mother, and taking up Molière, who was beginning to lose patience.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

## ANOTHER SUPPER AT THE BASTILLE.

SEVEN o'clock sounded from the great clock of the Bastille, — that famous clock which, like all the accessories of the State prison, the very use of which is a torture, brought to the prisoners' notice the lapse of every hour of their suffering. The timepiece of the Bastille, adorned with figures, like most of the clocks of the period, represented Saint Peter in bonds.

It was the supper hour of the unfortunate captives. The doors, grating on their enormous hinges, opened for the passage of the baskets and trays of provisions, the delicacy of which, as M. de Baisemeaux has himself taught us, was regulated by the condition in life of the prisoner. We understand on this head the theories of M. de Baisemeaux, sovereign dispenser of gastronomic delicacies, head cook of the royal fortress, whose trays, full laden, were ascending the steep staircases, carrying some consolation to the prisoners in the bottom of honestly filled bottles. This same hour was that of the governor's supper also. He had a guest to-day, and the spit turned more heavily than usual. Roast partridges flanked with quails and flanking a larded leveret; boiled fowls; ham, fried and sprinkled with white wine; *cardons* of Guipuzcoa and *la bisque d'écrevisses*, — these, together with the soups and *hors d'œuvres*, constituted the governor's bill of fare.

Baisemeaux, seated at table, was rubbing his hands and looking at the Bishop of Vannes, who, booted like a

cavalier, dressed in gray, with a sword at his side, kept talking of his hunger and testifying the liveliest impatience. M. de Baisemeaux de Montlezun was not accustomed to the unbending movements of his Greatness my Lord of Vannes ; and this evening Aramis, becoming quite sprightly, volunteered confidence on confidence. The prelate had again a little touch of the musketeer about him. The bishop just trenched on the borders only of license in his style of conversation. As for M. de Baisemeaux, with the facility of vulgar people, he gave himself loose rein, on this touch of *abandon* on the part of his guest. "Monsieur," said he, — "for indeed to-night I don't like to call you Monseigneur —"

"By no means," said Aramis ; "call me Monsieur, — I am booted."

"Do you know, Monsieur, of whom you remind me this evening ?"

"No ! faith," said Aramis, taking up his glass ; "but I hope I remind you of a good companion."

"You remind me of two, Monsieur. François, shut the window ; the wind may annoy his Greatness."

"And let him go," added Aramis. "The supper is completely served, and we shall eat it very well without waiters. I like extremely to be *tête-à-tête* when I am with a friend." Baisemeaux bowed respectfully. "I like extremely," continued Aramis, "to help myself."

"Retire, François !" cried Baisemeaux. "I was saying that your Greatness puts me in mind of two persons, — one very illustrious, the late cardinal, the great cardinal of La Rochelle, who wore boots like you."

"Indeed," said Aramis ; "and the other ?"

"The other was a certain musketeer, very handsome, very brave, very adventurous, very fortunate, who from being abbé turned musketeer, and from musketeer turned

abbé." Aramis condescended to smile. "From abbé," continued Baisemeaux, encouraged by Aramis's smile, — "from abbé, bishop, and from bishop —"

"Ah, stay there, I beg!" exclaimed Aramis.

"I say, Monsieur, that you give me the idea of a cardinal."

"Enough, dear M. Baisemeaux! As you said, I have on the boots of a cavalier; but I do not intend, for all that, to embroil myself with the church this evening."

"You have wicked intentions, however, Monseigneur."

"Oh, yes; wicked I own, as everything mundane is."

"You traverse the town and the streets in disguise?"

"In disguise, as you say."

"And do you still make use of your sword?"

"Yes, I should think so; but only when I am compelled. Do me the pleasure to summon François."

"Have you no wine there?"

"'T is not for wine, but because it is hot here and the window is shut."

"I shut the windows at supper-time so as not to hear the sounds or the arrival of couriers."

"Ah, yes! You hear them when the window is open?"

"But too well, and that disturbs me. You understand!"

"Nevertheless, I am suffocated. François!" François entered. "Open the windows, I pray you, François! You will allow him, dear M. Baisemeaux?"

"You are at home here," answered the governor. The window was opened.

"Do you not think," said M. de Baisemeaux, "that you will find yourself very lonely, now that M. de la Fère has returned to his household gods at Blois? He is a very old friend, is he not?"

"You know it as I do, Baisemeaux, seeing that you were in the musketeers with us."

"Bah ! with my friends I reckon neither bottles nor years."

"And you are right. But I do more than love M. de la Fère, dear Baisemeaux ; I venerate him."

"Well, for my part, though 't is singular," said the governor, "I prefer M. d'Artagnan to the count. There is a man for you, who drinks long and well ! That kind of people allow you at least to penetrate their thoughts."

"Baisemeaux, make me tipsy to-night ! Let us have a debauch as of old ; and if I have a trouble at the bottom of my heart, I promise you, you shall see it as you would a diamond at the bottom of your glass."

"Bravo !" said Baisemeaux ; and he poured out a great glass of wine and drank it off at a draught, trembling with joy at the idea of being, by hook or by crook, in the secret of some high archiepiscopal misdemeanor. While he was drinking he did not see with what attention Aramis was noting the sounds in the great court. A courier arrived about eight o'clock, as François brought in the fifth bottle ; and although the courier made a great noise, Baisemeaux heard nothing.

"The devil take him !" said Aramis.

"What ? who ?" asked Baisemeaux. "I hope 't is neither the wine you drink nor he who is the cause of your drinking it."

"No ; it is a horse, who is making noise enough in the court for a whole squadron."

"Pooh ! some courier or other," replied the governor, redoubling his numerous bumpers. "Yes, the devil take him, and so quickly that we shall never hear him speak more ! Hurrah ! hurrah !"



"You forget me, Baisemeaux ! my glass is empty," said Aramis, showing his dazzling goblet.

"Upon honor, you delight me. François, wine !" François entered. "Wine, fellow ! and better."

"Yes, Monsieur, yes ; but a courier has just arrived."

"Let him go to the devil, I say."

"Yes, Monsieur, but —"

"Let him leave his news at the office ; we will see to it to-morrow. To-morrow, — there will be time to-morrow ; there will be daylight," said Baisemeaux, chanting the words.

"Ah, Monsieur," grumbled the soldier François, in spite of himself, — "Monsieur !"

"Take care," said Aramis, "take care !"

"Of what, dear M. d'Herblay ?" said Baisemeaux, half intoxicated.

"The letter which the courier brings to the governor of a fortress is sometimes an order."

"Nearly always."

"Do not orders issue from the ministers ?"

"Yes, undoubtedly ; but —"

"And what do these ministers do but countersign the signature of the king ?"

"Perhaps you are right. Nevertheless, 't is very tiresome when you are sitting before a good table, *tête-à-tête* with a friend — Ah ! I beg your pardon, Monsieur ; I forgot that it is I who invite you to supper, and that I speak to a future cardinal."

"Let us pass over that, dear Baisemeaux, and return to our soldier, — to François."

"Well, and what has François done ?"

"He has demurred !"

"He was wrong, then."

"However, he *has* demurred, you see ; 't is because

there is something extraordinary in this matter. It is very possible that it was not François who was wrong in demurring, but you, who will be wrong in not listening to him.

"Wrong! I to be wrong before François! — that seems rather hard."

"Pardon me, merely an irregularity. But I thought it my duty to make an observation which I deem important."

"Oh, perhaps you are right!" stammered Baisemeaux. "The king's order is sacred; but as to orders that arrive when one is at supper, I repeat, may the devil —"

"If you had said as much to the great cardinal, eh! my dear Baisemeaux, and if his order had been important —"

"I do it that I may not disturb a bishop. *Morbleu!* Am I not, then, excusable?"

"Do not forget, Baisemeaux, that I have worn the uniform, and am accustomed to see everywhere obedience."

"You wish, then —"

"I wish that you should do your duty, my friend; yes, at least before this soldier."

"'T is mathematically true," exclaimed Baisemeaux. François still waited. "Let them send this order of the king up to me," he said, recovering himself. And he added in a low tone: "Do you know what it is? I will tell you; it is something about as interesting as this: 'Beware of fire near the powder-magazine,' or 'Look close after such a one, who is clever at escaping.' Ah! if you only knew, Monseigneur, how many times I have been suddenly awakened from the very sweetest and deepest slumber by messengers arriving at full gallop to tell me, or rather bring me a slip of paper containing these words: 'M. de Baisemeaux, what news?' 'T is clear enough that those who waste their time writing such orders have never slept in the Bastille. They would know better the thick-

ness of my walls, the vigilance of my officers, the number of my rounds. But, indeed, what can you expect, Monseigneur? It is their business to write and torment me when I am at rest, and to trouble me when I am happy," added Baisemeaux, bowing to Aramis. "Then let us leave them to their business."

"And do you do yours," added the bishop, smiling, but with command in his expression notwithstanding.

François re-entered. Baisemeaux took from his hands the minister's order. He slowly undid it, and as slowly read it. Aramis pretended to be drinking, so as to be able to watch his host through the glass. Then, having read it, "What was I just saying?" Baisemeaux exclaimed.

"What is it?" asked the bishop.

"An order of release! There, now; excellent news, indeed, to disturb us!"

"Excellent news for him whom it concerns, you will at least agree, my dear governor!"

"And at eight o'clock in the evening!"

"It is charitable!"

"Oh! charity is all very well; but it is for that fellow who is low-spirited, and not for me who am amusing myself," said Baisemeaux, exasperated.

"Will you lose by him, then? And is the prisoner who is to be set at liberty a high payer?"

"Oh yes, indeed! a miserable, five-livre rat!"

"Let me see it," asked M. d'Herblay. "It is no indiscretion?"

"By no means; read it."

"There is 'Urgent' on the paper; you noticed that, I suppose?"

"Oh, admirable! 'Urgent!'—a man who has been there ten years! It is *urgent* to set him free to-day, this very evening, at eight o'clock!—*urgent*!" and Baise-

meaux, shrugging his shoulders with an air of supreme disdain, flung the order on the table and began eating again. "They are fond of these dodges," he said, with his mouth full; "they seize a man, some fine day, maintain him for ten years, and write to you, 'Watch this fellow well,' or 'Keep him very strictly.' And then, as soon as you are accustomed to look upon the prisoner as a dangerous man, all of a sudden, without cause or precedent, they write, 'Set him at liberty;' and add to their mis-sive, 'Urgent.' You will own, my Lord, 't is enough to make one shrug his shoulders!"

"What do you expect? It is they who write," said Aramis, "and it is for you to execute the order."

"Good! good! execute it! Oh, patience! You must not imagine that I am a slave."

"Gracious Heaven! my very good M. Baisemeaux, who ever said so? Your independence is known."

"Thank Heaven!"

"But your good heart also is known."

"Ah, don't speak of it!"

"And your obedience to your superiors. Once a soldier, you see, Baisemeaux, always a soldier."

"And so I shall strictly obey; and to-morrow morning, at daybreak, the prisoner referred to shall be set free."

"To-morrow?"

"At dawn."

"Why not this evening, seeing that the *lettre de cachet* bears, both on the direction and inside, 'Urgent'?"

"Because this evening we are at supper, and our affairs are urgent too!"

"Dear Baisemeaux, booted though I be, I feel myself a priest; and charity has higher claims upon me than hunger and thirst. This unfortunate man has suffered long enough, since you have just told me that he has been

your prisoner these ten years. Abridge his suffering. His good time has come ; give him the benefit quickly. God will repay you in Paradise with years of felicity."

"You wish it?"

"I entreat you."

"What ! in the very middle of our repast?"

"I implore you ; such an action is worth ten Benedicites."

"It shall be as you desire ; only, our supper will get cold."

"Oh, never heed that !"

Baisemeaux leaned back to ring for François, and by a very natural motion turned round towards the door. The order had remained on the table. Aramis seized the opportunity when Baisemeaux was not looking to change the paper for another, folded in the same manner, which he took from his pocket. "François," said the governor, "let the major come up here with the turnkeys of the Bertaudière." François bowed and quitted the room, leaving the two companions alone.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

## THE GENERAL OF THE ORDER.

THERE was now a brief silence, during which Aramis never removed his eyes from Baisemeaux for a moment. The latter seemed only half decided to disturb himself thus in the middle of supper ; and it was clear that he was seeking some pretext, whether good or bad, for delay, at any rate till after dessert. And it appeared also that he had hit upon a pretext at last.

“ Eh ! but it is impossible,” he cried.

“ How impossible ? ” said Aramis. “ Give me a glimpse of this impossibility.”

“ ’T is impossible to set a prisoner at liberty at such an hour. Where can he go to, — he, who is unacquainted with Paris ? ”

“ He will go wherever he can.”

“ You see, now, one might as well set a blind man free ! ”

“ I have a carriage, and will take him wherever he wishes.”

“ You have an answer for everything. François, tell Monsieur the Major to go and open the cell of M. Seldon, No. 3 Bertaudière.”

“ Seldon ! ” exclaimed Aramis, very naturally. “ You said Seldon, I think ? ”

“ I said Seldon, of course. ’T is the name of the man to be set free.”

“ Oh ! you mean to say Marchiali ? ” said Aramis.



"Marchiali? oh, yes, indeed! No, no! Seldon."

"I think you are making a mistake, M. Baisemeaux."

"I have read the order."

"And I also."

"And I saw 'Seldon' in letters as large as that;" and Baisemeaux held up his finger.

"And I read 'Marchiali,' in characters as large as this," said Aramis, holding up two fingers.

"To the proof; let us throw a light on the matter," said Baisemeaux, confident he was right. "There is the paper; you have only to read it."

"I read 'Marchiali,'" returned Aramis, spreading out the paper. "Look!"

Baisemeaux looked, and his arms dropped suddenly. "Yes, yes," he said, quite overwhelmed; "yes, Marchiali. 'T is plainly written 'Marchiali.' Quite true!"

"Ah!"

"How? The man of whom we have talked so much? The man whom they are every day telling me to take such care of?"

"There is 'Marchiali,'" repeated the inflexible Bishop of Vannes.

"I must own it, Monseigneur. But I understand absolutely nothing about it."

"You believe your eyes, at any rate."

"To tell me very plainly there is 'Marchiali.'"

"And in a good handwriting too."

"'T is a wonder! I still see this order and the name of Seldon, Irishman. I see it. Ah! I even recollect that under this name there was a blot of ink."

"No, there is no ink; no, there is no blot."

"Oh, but there was, though! I know it, because I rubbed the powder that was over the blot."

"In a word, be it how it may, dear M. Baisemeaux,"

said Aramis, "and whatever you may have seen, the order is signed to release Marchiali, blot or no blot."

"The order is signed to release Marchiali!" repeated Baisemeaux, mechanically endeavoring to regain his courage.

"And you are going to release this prisoner. If your heart dictates to you to deliver Seldon also, I declare to you I will not oppose it the least in the world."

Aramis accompanied this remark with a smile, the irony of which effectually dispelled Baisemeaux's confusion of mind and restored his courage.

"Monseigneur," said the governor, "this Marchiali is the very same prisoner whom the other day a priest, confessor of *our order*, came to visit in so imperious and so secret a manner."

"I don't know that, Monsieur," replied the bishop.

"T is no very long time ago, dear M. d'Herblay."

"It is true. But *with us*, Monsieur, it is good that the man of to-day should no longer know what the man of yesterday did."

"In any case," said Baisemeaux, "the visit of the Jesuit confessor must have given happiness to this man."

Aramis made no reply, but recommenced eating and drinking. As for Baisemeaux, no longer touching anything that was on the table, he again took up the order and examined it in every way. This investigation, under ordinary circumstances, would have made the ears of the impatient Aramis burn with anger; but the Bishop of Vannes did not become incensed for so little, especially when he had murmured to himself that to do so was dangerous. "Are you going to release Marchiali?" he said. "What mellow and fragrant sherry this is, my dear governor!"

"Monseigneur," replied Baisemeaux, "I shall release the prisoner Marchiali when I have summoned the courier who brought the order, and above all, when by interrogating him I have satisfied myself."

"The order is sealed, and the courier is ignorant of the contents. What do you want to satisfy yourself about?"

"Be it so, Monseigneur; but I shall send to the ministry, and M. de Lyonne will either confirm or withdraw the order."

"What is the good of all that?" asked Aramis, coldly.

"What good?"

"Yes; what is your object, I ask?"

"The object of never deceiving one's self, Monseigneur, of not failing in the respect which a subaltern owes to his superior officers, nor neglecting the duties of that service which one has voluntarily accepted."

"Very good; you have just spoken so eloquently that I cannot but admire you. It is true that a subaltern owes respect to his superiors; he is guilty when he deceives himself, and he should be punished if he disregard either the duties or laws of his office."

Baisemeaux looked at the bishop with astonishment.

"It follows," pursued Aramis, "that you are going to ask advice in order to put your conscience at ease in the matter?"

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"And if a superior officer gives you orders, you will obey?"

"Never doubt it, Monseigneur."

"You know the king's signature very well, M. de Baisemeaux?"

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"Is it not on this order of release?"

"It is true, but it may —"

"Be forged, you mean?"

"That is possible, Monseigneur."

"You are right. And that of M. de Lyonne?"

"I see it plain enough on the order; but just as the king's signature may have been forged, so also, even more likely, may M. de Lyonne's."

"Your logic has the stride of a giant, M. de Baisemeaux," said Aramis; "and your reasoning is irresistible. But on what special grounds do you base your idea that these signatures are false?"

"On this: the absence of counter-signatures. Nothing checks his Majesty's signature; and M. de Lyonne is not there to tell me he has signed."

"Well, M. de Baisemeaux," said Aramis, bending an eagle glance on the governor, "I adopt so frankly your doubts, and your mode of clearing them up, that I will take a pen, if you will give me one."

Baisemeaux gave him a pen.

"And a sheet of white paper," added Aramis.

Baisemeaux handed some paper.

"Now, I — I, also — I, here present — incontestably, I — am going to write an order to which I am certain you will give credence, incredulous as you are!"

Baisemeaux turned pale at this icy assurance of manner. It seemed to him that that voice of Aramis, but just now so playful and so gay, had become funereal and sinister; that the wax-lights had changed into the tapers of a mortuary chapel, and the glasses of wine into chalices of blood.

Aramis took a pen and wrote. Baisemeaux, in terror, read over his shoulder.

"A. M. D. G." wrote the bishop; and he drew a cross under these four letters, which signify *ad majorem Dei gloriam*, and thus continued: —

It is our pleasure that the order brought to M. de Baisemeaux de Montlezun, governor, for the king, of the castle of the Bastille, be held by him good and effectual, and be immediately carried into operation.

(Signed)

D'HERBLAY,

*General of the Order, by the grace of God.*

Baisemeaux was so profoundly astonished that his features remained contracted, his lips parted, and his eyes fixed. He did not move an inch, nor articulate a sound. Nothing could be heard in that large chamber but the buzzing of a little moth which was fluttering about the candles.

Aramis, without even deigning to look at the man whom he had reduced to so miserable a condition, drew from his pocket a small case of black wax. He sealed the letter, and stamped it with a seal suspended at his breast, beneath his doublet; and when the operation was concluded, presented — still in silence — the missive to M. de Baisemeaux. The latter, whose hands trembled in a manner to excite pity, turned a dull and meaningless gaze upon the letter. A last gleam of feeling played over his features, and he fell, as if thunderstruck, on a chair.

“Come, come,” said Aramis, after a long silence, during which the governor of the Bastille had slowly recovered his senses, “do not lead me to believe, dear Baisemeaux, that the presence of the general of the order is as terrible as that of the Almighty, and that men die merely from seeing him! Take courage, rouse yourself; give me your hand, and obey!”

Baisemeaux, reassured, if not satisfied, obeyed, kissed Aramis's hand, and rose from his chair. “Immediately?” he murmured.

“Oh, there is no pressing haste, my host; take your place again, and do the honors over this beautiful dessert.”

"Monseigneur, I shall never recover such a shock as this,—I who have laughed, who have jested with you ! I who have dared to treat you on a footing of equality !"

"Say nothing about it, old comrade," replied the bishop, who perceived how strained the cord was, and how dangerous it might be to break it ; "say nothing about it. Let us each live in our own way : to you, my protection and my friendship ; to me, your obedience. Exactly fulfilling these two requirements, let us live happily."

Baisemeaux reflected. He perceived, at a glance, the consequences of this withdrawal of a prisoner by means of a forged order ; and putting in the scale the guarantee offered him by the official order of the general, did not consider it of any value.

Aramis divined this. "My dear Baisemeaux," said he, "you are a simpleton ! Lose this habit of reflection when I give myself the trouble to think for you."

At another gesture made by Aramis, Baisemeaux bowed again. "How shall I set about it ?"

"What is the process for releasing a prisoner ?"

"I have the regulations."

"Well, then, follow the regulations, my friend."

"I go with my major to the prisoner's room, and conduct him, if he is a personage of importance."

"But this Marchiali is not an important personage," said Aramis, carelessly.

"I don't know," answered the governor ; as if he would have said, "It is for you to instruct me."

"Then, if you don't know it, I am right ; so act towards Marchiali as you act towards one of obscure station."

"Good ; the regulations so provide. They are to the effect that the turnkey, or one of the lower officials, shall bring the prisoner before the governor, in the office."

"Well, 't is very wise, that ; and then ?"



“Then we return to the prisoner the valuables he wore at the time of his imprisonment, his clothes and papers, if the minister’s order has not otherwise directed.”

“What was the minister’s order as to this Marchiali?”

“Nothing; for the unhappy man arrived here without jewels, without papers, and almost without clothes.”

“See how simple it all is! Indeed, Baisemeaux, you make a mountain of everything. Remain here, and make them bring the prisoner to the governor’s house.”

Baisemeaux obeyed. He summoned his lieutenant, and gave him an order, which the latter passed on, without disturbing himself about it, to the next whom it concerned.

Half an hour afterwards they heard a gate shut in the court; it was the door to the dungeon which had just rendered up its prey to the free air. Aramis blew out all the candles which lighted the room but one, which he left burning behind the door. This flickering glare prevented the sight from resting steadily on any object. It multiplied tenfold the changing forms and shadows of the place by its wavering uncertainty. Steps drew near.

“Go and meet your men,” said Aramis to Baisemeaux.

The governor obeyed. The sergeant and turnkeys disappeared. Baisemeaux re-entered, followed by a prisoner. Aramis had placed himself in the shade; he saw without being seen. Baisemeaux, in an agitated tone of voice, made the young man acquainted with the order which set him at liberty. The prisoner listened, without making a single gesture or saying a word.

“You will swear, — the regulation requires it,” — added the governor, “never to reveal anything that you have seen or heard in the Bastille.”

The prisoner perceived a crucifix; he stretched out his hands, and swore with his lips. “And now, Monsieur, that you are free, whither do you intend going?”

The prisoner turned his head, as if looking behind him for some protection which he had expected. Then was it that Aramis came out of the shadow. "I am here," he said, "to render the gentleman whatever service he may please to ask."

The prisoner slightly reddened, and without hesitation passed his arm through that of Aramis. "God have you in his holy keeping!" he said, in a voice the firmness of which made the governor tremble as much as the form of the blessing astonished him.

Aramis, on shaking hands with Baisemeaux, said to him: "Does my order trouble you? Do you fear their finding it here, should they come to search?"

"I desire to keep it, Monseigneur," said Baisemeaux. "If they found it here, it would be a certain indication of my ruin, and in that case you would be a powerful and a last auxiliary for me."

"Being your accomplice, you mean?" answered Aramis, shrugging his shoulders. "Adieu, Baisemeaux!" said he.

The horses were in waiting, making the carriage shake with their impatience. Baisemeaux accompanied the bishop to the bottom of the steps. Aramis caused his companion to enter before him, then followed, and without giving the driver any further order, "Go on!" said he.

The carriage rattled over the pavement of the courtyard. An officer with a torch went before the horses, and gave orders at every post to let them pass. During the time taken in opening all the barriers, Aramis barely breathed, and you might have heard his heart beat against his ribs. The prisoner, buried in a corner of the carriage, made no more sign of life than his companion. At length a jolt more severe than the others announced to them that they had cleared the last watercourse. Behind

the carriage closed the last gate, — that in the Rue St. Antoine. No more walls either on the right or left ; heaven everywhere, liberty everywhere, life everywhere ! The horses, kept in check by a vigorous hand, went quietly as far as the middle of the faubourg. There they began to trot. Little by little, whether they warmed over it or whether they were urged, they gained in swiftness ; and once past Bercy, the carriage seemed to fly, so great was the ardor of the coursers. These horses ran thus as far as Villeneuve-Saint-Georges, where relays were waiting. Then four instead of two whirled the carriage away in the direction of Melun, and pulled up for a moment in the middle of the forest of Sénart. No doubt the order had been given the postilion beforehand, for Aramis had no occasion even to make a sign.

“What is the matter ?” asked the prisoner, as if waking from a long dream.

“The matter is, Monseigneur,” said Aramis, “that before going further, it is necessary that your royal Highness and I should converse.”

“I will wait an opportunity, Monsieur,” answered the young prince.

“We could not have a better, Monseigneur ; we are in the middle of a forest, and no one can hear us.”

“The postilion ?”

“The postilion of this relay is deaf and dumb, Monseigneur.”

“I am at your service, M. d’Herblay.”

“Is it your pleasure to remain in the carriage ?”

“Yes ; we are comfortably seated, and I like this carriage ; it has restored me to liberty.”

“Wait, Monseigneur ; there is yet a precaution to be taken.”

“What ?”

"We are here on the highway; cavaliers or carriages travelling like ourselves might pass, and seeing us stopping deem us in some difficulty. Let us avoid offers of assistance, which would embarrass us."

"Give the postilion orders to conceal the carriage in one of the side avenues."

"T is exactly what I wished to do, Monseigneur."

Aramis made a sign to the deaf and dumb driver of the carriage, whom he touched on the arm. The latter dismounted, took the leaders by the bridle, and led them over the velvet sward and the mossy grass of a winding alley, at the bottom of which, on this moonless night, the deep shades formed a curtain blacker than ink. This done, the man lay down on a slope near his horses, which on either side kept nibbling the young oak shoots.

"I am listening," said the young prince to Aramis; "but what are you doing there?"

"I am disarming myself of my pistols, of which we have no further need, Monseigneur."

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

## THE TEMPTER.

"AY Prince," said Aramis, turning in the carriage towards his companion, "weak creature as I am, so unpretending in genius, so low in the scale of intelligent beings, it has never yet happened to me to converse with a man without penetrating his thoughts through that living mask which has been thrown over our mind in order to retain its expression. But to-night, in this darkness, in the reserve which you maintain, I can read nothing on your features, and something tells me that I shall have great difficulty in wresting from you a sincere declaration. I beseech you, then, not for love of me, — for subjects should never weigh as anything in the balance which princes hold, — but for love of yourself, to attend to every syllable I may utter, and to every tone of my voice, — which under our present grave circumstances will all have a sense and value as important as any words ever spoken in the world."

"I listen," repeated the young prince, decidedly, "without either eagerly seeking or fearing anything you are about to say to me;" and he sank still deeper in the thick cushions of the carriage, trying to deprive his companion not only of the sight of him, but even of the very idea of his presence.

Black was the darkness which fell wide and dense from the summits of the intertwining trees. The carriage, covered in by this vast roof, would not have received a

particle of light, not even if a ray could have struggled through the wreaths of mist which were rising in the avenue of the wood.

“Monseigneur,” resumed Aramis, “you know the history of the government which to-day controls France. The king issued from an infancy imprisoned like yours, obscure as yours, and confined as yours; only, instead of enduring, like yourself, this slavery in a prison, this obscurity in solitude, these straitened circumstances in concealment, he has borne all these miseries, humiliations, and distresses in full daylight, under the pitiless sun of royalty, — on an elevation so flooded with light, where every stain appears a miserable blemish, and every glory a stain. The king has suffered; it rankles in his mind, and he will avenge himself. He will be a bad king. I say not that he will pour out blood, like Louis XI. or Charles IX., for he has no mortal injuries to avenge; but he will devour the means and substance of his people, for he has himself suffered injuriously as to his own welfare and possessions. In the first place, then, I quite acquit my conscience, when I consider openly the merits and faults of this prince; and if I condemn him, my conscience absolves me.”

Aramis paused. It was not to ascertain if the silence of the forest remained undisturbed, but it was to gather up his thoughts from the very bottom of his soul, and to leave the thoughts he had uttered sufficient time to eat deeply into the mind of his companion.

“All that God does, he does well,” continued the Bishop of Vannes; “and I am so persuaded of it that I have long been thankful to have been chosen depositary of the secret which I have aided you to discover. To a just Providence was necessary an instrument, at once penetrating, persevering, and convinced, to accomplish a



great work. I am this instrument. I possess penetration, perseverance, conviction ; I govern a mysterious people, who has taken for its motto the motto of God, *Patiens quia æternus.*" The prince moved. "I divine, Monseigneur, why you raise your head, and that my having rule over a people astonishes you. You did not know you were dealing with a king : oh, Monseigneur, king of a people very humble, very poor, — humble, because they have no force save when creeping ; poor, because never, almost never in this world, do my people reap the harvest they sow, or eat the fruit they cultivate. They labor for an abstract idea ; they heap together all the atoms of their power to form one man ; and round this man, with the sweat of their labor, they create a misty halo which his genius shall, in turn, render a glory gilded with the rays of all the crowns in Christendom. Such is the man you have beside you, Monseigneur. He has drawn you from the abyss for a great purpose, and he desires, in furtherance of this sublime purpose, to raise you above the powers of the earth, — above himself."

The prince lightly touched Aramis's arm. "You speak to me," he said, "of that religious order whose chief you are. For me the result of your words is, that the day you desire to hurl down the man you shall have raised, the event will be accomplished ; and that you will keep under your hand your creature of to-day."

"Undeceive yourself, Monseigneur," replied the bishop. "I should not take the trouble to play this terrible game with your royal Highness, if I had not a double interest in winning. The day you are elevated, you are elevated forever ; you will overturn the footstool, as you rise, and will send it rolling so far that not even the sight of it will ever again recall to you its right to your remembrance."

"Oh, Monsieur !"

"Your movement, Monseigneur, arises from an excellent disposition. I thank you. Be well assured, I aspire to more than gratitude ! I am convinced that when arrived at the summit you will judge me still more worthy to be your friend ; and then, Monseigneur, we two will do such great deeds that ages hereafter shall speak of them."

"Tell me plainly, Monsieur, — tell me without disguise, — what I am to-day, and what you aim at my being to-morrow."

"You are the son of King Louis XIII., brother of Louis XIV. ; you are the natural and legitimate heir to the throne of France. In keeping you near him, as Monsieur has been kept, — Monsieur, your younger brother, — the king would reserve to himself the right of being legitimate sovereign. The doctors only and God could dispute his legitimacy. But the doctors always prefer the king who is to the king who is not. God has wrought against himself in wronging a prince who is an honest man. But God has willed that you should be persecuted ; and this persecution to-day consecrates you king of France. You had then a right to reign, seeing that it is disputed ; you had a right to be proclaimed, seeing that you have been concealed ; you are of kingly blood, since no one has dared to shed your blood as your servants' has been shed. Now see what he has done for you, — this God whom you have so often accused of having in every way thwarted you ! He has given you the features, figure, age, and voice of your brother ; and the very causes of your persecution are about to become those of your triumphant restoration. To-morrow, after to-morrow, — from the very first, regal phantom, living shade of Louis XIV., you will sit upon his throne, whence the will of Heaven, confided in execution to the arm of man, will have hurled him without hope of return."

"I understand," said the prince; "my brother's blood will not be shed, then."

"You will be sole arbiter of his fate."

"The secret of which they made an evil use against me?"

"You will employ it against him. What did he do to conceal it? He concealed you. Living image of himself, you will defeat the conspiracy of Mazarin and Anne of Austria. You, my Prince, will have the same interest in concealing him, who will as a prisoner resemble you, as you will resemble him as king."

"I return to what I was saying to you. Who will guard him?"

"Who guarded you?"

"You know this secret, — you have made use of it with regard to myself. Who else knows it?"

"The queen-mother and Madame de Chevreuse."

"What will they do?"

"Nothing, if you choose."

"How is that?"

"How can they recognize you, if you act so that no one can recognize you?"

"'T is true; but there are grave difficulties."

"State them, Prince."

"My brother is married; I cannot take my brother's wife."

"I will cause Spain to consent to a divorce: it is in the interest of your new policy; it is human morality. All that is really noble and really useful in this world will find its account therein."

"The imprisoned king will speak."

"To whom do you think he should speak, — to the walls?"

"You mean, by walls, the men in whom you put confidence."

"If need be, yes. And besides, your royal Highness —"

"Besides?"

"I was going to say, that the designs of Providence do not stop on such a fair road. Every scheme of this calibre is completed by its results, like a geometrical calculation. The king in prison will not be for you the cause of embarrassment that you have been for the king enthroned. His soul is naturally proud and impatient; it is, moreover, disarmed and enfeebled by being accustomed to honors, and by the license of supreme power. God, who has willed that the concluding step in the geometrical calculation I have had the honor of describing to your royal Highness should be your accession to the throne and the destruction of him who is hurtful to you, has also determined that the conquered one shall soon end both his own and your sufferings. Therefore his soul and body have been adapted for but a brief agony. Put into prison as a private individual, left alone with your doubts, deprived of everything, you have met all with the force of uninterrupted custom. But your brother, a captive, forgotten, and in bonds, will not long endure the calamity; and Heaven will resume his soul at the appointed time, — that is to say, soon."

At this point in Aramis's gloomy analysis a bird of night uttered from the depths of the forest that prolonged and plaintive cry which makes every creature tremble.

"I will exile the deposed king," said Philippe, shuddering; "it will be more humane."

"The king's good pleasure will decide the point," said Aramis. "But has the problem been well put? Have I brought out the solution according to the wishes or the foresight of your royal Highness?"

"Yes, Monsieur, yes; you have forgotten nothing, — except, indeed, two things."

“The first?”

“Let us speak of it at once, with the same frankness we have already used. Let us speak of the causes which may bring about the ruin of all the hopes we have conceived. Let us speak of the dangers we incur.”

“They would be immense, infinite, terrific, insurmountable, if, as I have said, all things did not concur in rendering them absolutely of no account. There is no danger either for you or for me, if the constancy and intrepidity of your royal Highness are equal to that perfection of resemblance to your brother which Nature has bestowed upon you. I repeat it, there are no dangers, — only obstacles; a word, indeed, which I find in all languages, but have always ill understood, and, were I king, would have obliterated as useless and absurd.”

“Yes, indeed, Monsieur; there is a very serious obstacle, an insurmountable danger, which you are forgetting.”

“Ah!” said Aramis.

“There is conscience, which cries aloud; remorse, which lacerates.”

“Oh! that is true,” said the bishop; “there is a weakness of heart of which you remind me. Oh! you are right; that, indeed, is an immense obstacle. The horse afraid of the ditch leaps into the middle of it, and is killed! The man who tremblingly crosses his sword with that of another leaves loopholes by which death enters!”

“Have you a brother?” said the young man to Aramis.

“I am alone in the world,” said the latter, with a hard, dry voice.

“But surely there is some one in the world whom you love?” added Philippe.

“No one! — Yes, I love you.”

The young man sank into so profound a silence that



the sound of his breathing seemed to Aramis like a roaring tumult. "Monseigneur," he resumed, "I have not said all I had to say to your royal Highness ; I have not offered you all the salutary counsels and useful resources which I have at my disposal. It is useless to flash bright visions before the eyes of one who loves darkness ; useless, too, is it to let the grand roar of the cannon sound in the ears of one who loves repose and the quiet of the country. Monseigneur, I have your happiness spread out before me in my thoughts. I will let it fall from my lips ; take it up carefully for yourself, who look with such tender regard upon the bright heavens, the verdant meadows, the pure air. I know a country full of delights, an unknown Paradise, a corner of the world where alone, unfettered, and unknown, in the woods, amidst flowers, and streams of rippling water, you will forget all the misery that human folly has so recently allotted you. Oh, listen to me, my Prince ! I do not jest. I have a soul, and can read to the depths of your own. I will not take you, unready for your task, in order to cast you into the crucible of my own desires or my caprice or my ambition. Everything or nothing ! You are chilled, sick at heart, almost overcome by the excess of emotion which but one hour's liberty has produced in you. For me, that is a certain and unmistakable sign that you do not wish for large and long respiration. Let us choose, then, a life more humble, better suited to our strength. Heaven is my witness that I wish your happiness to be the result of the trial to which I have exposed you."

"Speak, speak !" said the prince, with a vivacity which did not escape Aramis.

"I know," resumed the prelate, "in the Bas-Poitou, a canton of which no one in France suspects the existence. Twenty leagues of country, — it is immense, is it not ?



Twenty leagues, Monseigneur, all covered with water and herbage and reeds ; the whole studded with islands covered with woods. These large marshes, covered with reeds as with a thick mantle, sleep silently and calmly under the smiling sun. A few fishermen with their families indolently pass their lives away there, with their large rafts of poplars and alders, the flooring formed of reeds, and the roof woven out of thick rushes. These barks, these floating houses, are wafted to and fro by the changing winds. Whenever they touch a bank, it is but by chance ; and so gently, too, that the sleeping fisherman is not awakened by the shock. Should he wish to land, it is because he has seen a large flight of landrails or plovers, of wild ducks, teal, widgeon, or woodcocks, which fall an easy prey to his nets or his gun. Silver shad, eels, greedy pike, red and gray mullet, fall in masses into his nets ; he has but to choose the finest and largest, and return the others to the waters. Never yet has the foot of man, be he soldier or simple citizen, — never has any one, indeed, penetrated into that district. The sun's rays there are soft and tempered ; in plots of solid earth, whose soil is rich and fertile, grows the vine, which nourishes with its generous juice its black and white grapes. Once a week a boat is sent to fetch the bread which has been baked at an oven, — the common property of all. There, like the seigneurs of early days, — powerful because of your dogs, your fishing-lines, your guns, and your beautiful reed-built house, — would you live, rich in the produce of the chase, in the plenitude of security. There would years of your life roll away, at the end of which, unrecognizable, transformed, you will have compelled Heaven to reshape your destiny. There are a thousand pistoles in this bag, Monseigneur, — more than sufficient to purchase the whole marsh of which I have spoken ;

more than enough to live there as many years as you have days to live ; more than enough to constitute you the richest, the freest, and the happiest man in the country. Accept it, as I offer it to you, — sincerely, cheerfully. Forthwith, from the carriage here we will unharness two of the horses ; the mute, my servant, shall conduct you — travelling by night, sleeping by day — to the locality I have mentioned ; and I shall at least have the satisfaction of knowing that I have rendered to my prince the service that he himself preferred. I shall have made one man happy ; and Heaven for that will hold me in better account than if I had made one man powerful, — for that is far more difficult. And now, Monseigneur, your answer to this proposition ? Here is the money. Nay, do not hesitate ! At Poitou you can risk nothing, except the chance of catching the fevers prevalent there ; and even of them, the so-called wizards of the country may cure you for your pistoles. If you play the other game, you run the chance of being assassinated on a throne or of being strangled in a prison. Upon my soul, I assure you, now I compare them together, upon my life, I should hesitate.”

“Monsieur,” replied the young prince, “before I determine, let me alight from this carriage, walk on the ground, and consult that voice by which God speaks in unsullied Nature. Ten minutes, and I will answer.”

“As you please, Monseigneur,” said Aramis, bending before him with respect, — so solemn and august in its tone and address had been the voice which had just spoken.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

## CROWN AND TIARA.

ARAMIS was the first to descend from the carriage ; he held the door open for the young man. He saw him place his foot on the mossy ground with a trembling of the whole body, and walk round the carriage with an unsteady and almost tottering step. It seemed as if the poor prisoner were unaccustomed to walk on God's earth. It was the 15th of August, about eleven o'clock at night ; thick clouds, portending a tempest, overspread the heavens, and shrouded all light and prospect beneath their heavy folds. The extremities of the avenues were imperceptibly detached from the copse by a lighter shadow of opaque gray, which upon closer examination became visible in the midst of the obscurity. But the fragrance which ascended from the grass, fresher and more penetrating than that which exhaled from the trees around him ; the warm and balmy air which enveloped him for the first time in years ; the ineffable enjoyment of liberty in an open country, — spoke to the prince in a language so intoxicating that notwithstanding the great reserve, we should almost say the dissimulation, of which we have tried to give an idea, he could not restrain his emotion, and breathed a sigh of joy. Then, by degrees, he raised his aching head and inhaled the perfumed air, as it was wafted in gentle gusts across his uplifted face. Crossing his arms on his chest as if to control this new sensation of delight, he drank in delicious draughts of that mysterious air which penetrates at night-

time through lofty forests. The sky he was contemplating, the murmuring waters, the moving creatures, — were not these real? Was not Aramis a madman to suppose that he had aught else to dream of in this world? Those exciting pictures of country life, so free from cares, from fears and troubles; that ocean of happy days which glitters incessantly before all youthful imaginations, — those were real allurements wherewith to fascinate an unhappy prisoner, worn out by prison life and emaciated by the close air of the Bastille. It was the picture, it will be remembered, drawn by Aramis when he offered to the prince the thousand pistoles which he had with him in the carriage, the enchanted Eden which the deserts of Bas-Poitou hid from the eyes of the world.

Similar to these were the reflections of Aramis as he watched, with an anxiety impossible to describe, the silent progress of the emotions of Philippe, whom he perceived gradually becoming more and more absorbed in his meditations. The young prince was offering up an inward prayer to Heaven for a ray of light upon that perplexity whence would issue his death or his life. It was an anxious time for the Bishop of Vannes, who had never before been so perplexed. Was his iron will, accustomed to overcome all obstacles, never finding itself inferior or vanquished, to be foiled in so vast a project from not having foreseen the influence which a few tree-leaves and a few cubic feet of air might have on the human mind? Aramis, overwhelmed by anxiety, contemplated the painful struggle which was taking place in Philippe's mind. This suspense lasted throughout the ten minutes which the young man had requested. During that eternity Philippe continued gazing with an imploring and sorrowful look towards the heavens. Aramis did not remove the piercing glance he had fixed on Philippe. Suddenly the young man bowed

his head. His thoughts returned to the earth, his looks perceptibly hardened, his brow contracted, his mouth assumed an expression of fierce courage; and then again his look became fixed, but now it reflected the flame of mundane splendors, — now it was like the face of Satan on the mountain when he brought into view the kingdoms and the powers of earth as temptations to Jesus. Aramis's appearance then became as gentle as it had before been gloomy.

Philippe, seizing his hand in a quick, agitated manner, exclaimed: "Let us go where the crown of France is to be found!"

"Is this your decision, Monseigneur?" asked Aramis.

"It is."

"Irrevocably so?"

Philippe did not even deign to reply. He gazed earnestly at the bishop, as if to ask him if it were possible for a man to waver after having once made up his mind.

"Those looks are flashes of fire which portray character," said Aramis, bowing over Philippe's hand. "You will be great, Monseigneur; I will answer for that."

"Let us resume our conversation. I wished to discuss two points with you: in the first place, the dangers or the obstacles we may meet with. That point is decided. The other is the conditions you intend to impose on me. It is your turn to speak, M. d'Herblay."

"The conditions, Monseigneur?"

"Doubtless. You will not check me in my course for a trifle, and you will not do me the injustice to suppose that I think you have no interest in this affair. Therefore, without subterfuge or hesitation, tell me the truth."

"I will do so, Monseigneur. Once a king —"

"When will that be?"

"To-morrow evening — I mean in the night."

"Explain to me how."



"When I shall have asked your Highness a question."

"Do so."

"I sent to your Highness a man in my confidence, with instructions to deliver some closely written notes, carefully drawn up which will thoroughly acquaint your Highness with the different persons who compose and will compose your court."

"I perused all the notes."

"Attentively?"

"I know them by heart."

"And understood them? Pardon me, but I may venture to ask that question of a poor, abandoned captive of the Bastille. It will not be requisite in a week's time to question further a mind like yours, when you will then be in full possession of liberty and power."

"Interrogate me, then, and I will be a scholar repeating his lesson to his master."

"We will begin with your family, Monseigneur."

"My mother, Anne of Austria? — all her sorrows, her painful malady? Oh, I know her, I know her!"

"Your second brother?" asked Aramis, bowing.

"To these notes," replied the prince, "you have added portraits so faithfully painted that I am able to recognize the persons whose characters, manners, and history you have so carefully portrayed. Monsieur, my brother, is a fine, dark young man, with a pale face; he does not love his wife, Henrietta, whom I, Louis XIV., loved a little, and still flirt with, even although she made me weep on the day she wished to dismiss Mademoiselle de la Vallière from her service in disgrace."

"You will have to be careful with regard to watchfulness of the latter," said Aramis; "she is sincerely attached to the actual king. The eyes of a woman who loves are not easily deceived."



"She is fair ; has blue eyes, whose affectionate gaze will reveal her identity. She halts slightly in her gait. She writes a letter every day, to which I shall have to send an answer by M. de Saint-Aignan."

"Do you know the latter ? "

"As if I saw him ; and I know the last verses he composed for me, as well as those I composed in answer to his."

"Very good. Do you know your ministers ? "

"Colbert, an ugly, dark-browed man, but intelligent ; his hair covering his forehead ; a large, heavy, full head ; the mortal enemy of M. Fouquet."

"We need not disturb ourselves about M. Colbert."

"No ; because necessarily you will require me to exile him, will you not ? "

Aramis, struck with admiration at the remark, said, "You will become very great, Monseigneur."

"You see," added the prince, "that I know my lesson by heart ; and with Heaven's assistance, and yours afterwards, I shall seldom go wrong."

"You have still a very awkward pair of eyes to deal with, Monseigneur."

"Yes ; the captain of the Musketeers, M. d'Artagnan, your friend."

"Yes ; I can well say ' my friend. ' "

"He who escorted La Vallière to Chaillot ; he who delivered up Monk, in a box, to Charles II. ; he who so faithfully served my mother ; he to whom the Crown of France owes so much that it owes everything. Do you intend to ask me to exile him also ? "

"Never, Sire ! D'Artagnan is a man to whom at a certain given time I will undertake to reveal everything. But be on your guard with him ; for if he discovers our plot before it is revealed to him, you or I will certainly be killed or taken. He is a man of action."

"I will consider. Now tell me about M. Fouquet; what do you wish to be done with regard to him?"

"One moment more, I entreat you, Monseigneur; and forgive me if I seem to fail in respect in questioning you further."

"It is your duty to do so, and, more than that, your right also."

"Before we pass to M. Fouquet, I should very much regret forgetting another friend of mine."

"M. du Vallon, the Hercules of France, you mean. Oh! so far as he is concerned, his fortune is assured."

"No; it is not he of whom I intended to speak."

"The Comte de la Fère, then?"

"And his son, — the son of all four of us."

"The lad who is dying of love for La Vallière, of whom my brother so disloyally deprived him? Be easy on that score! I shall know how to restore him. Tell me one thing, M. d'Herblay! Do men, when they love, forget the treachery that has been shown them? Can a man ever forgive the woman who has betrayed him? Is that a French custom; is it a law of the human heart?"

"A man who loves deeply, as deeply as Raoul loves Mademoiselle de la Vallière, finally forgets the fault of the woman he loves; but I do not know whether Raoul will forget."

"I will provide for that. Have you anything further to say about your friend?"

"No; that is all."

"Well, then, now for M. Fouquet. What do you wish me to do for him?"

"To continue him as superintendent, as he has hitherto acted, I entreat you."

"Be it so; but he is the first minister at present."

"Not quite so."

"A king ignorant and embarrassed as I shall be, will, as a matter of course, require a first minister of State."

"Your Majesty will require a friend."

"I have only one, and that is yourself."

"You will have many others by and by, but none so devoted, none so zealous for your glory."

"You will be my first minister of State."

"Not immediately, Monseigneur; for that would give rise to too much suspicion and astonishment."

"M. de Richelieu, the first minister of my grandmother, Marie de Médicis, was simply Bishop of Luçon, as you are Bishop of Vannes."

"I perceive that your royal Highness has studied my notes to great advantage; your amazing perspicacity overpowers me with delight."

"I know, indeed, that M. de Richelieu, by means of the queen's protection, soon became cardinal."

"It would be better," said Aramis, bowing, "that I should not be appointed first minister until after your royal Highness had procured my nomination as cardinal."

"You shall be nominated before two months are past, M. d'Herblay. But that is a matter of very trifling moment; you would not offend me if you were to ask more than that, and you would cause me serious regret if you were to limit yourself to that."

"In that case I have something still further to hope for, Monseigneur."

"Speak! speak!"

"M. Fouquet will not continue long at the head of affairs; he will soon get old. He is fond of pleasure, which at present is compatible with his labors, thanks to the youthfulness which he still retains; but this youthfulness will disappear at the approach of the first serious annoyance, or upon the first illness he may experience.

We will spare him the annoyance, because he is a brave and noble-hearted man ; but we cannot save him from ill-health. So it is determined. When you shall have paid all M. Fouquet's debts, and restored the finances to a sound condition, M. Fouquet will be able to remain the sovereign ruler in his little court of poets and painters ; we shall have made him rich. When that has been done, and I shall have become your royal Highness's prime minister, I shall be able to think of my own interests and yours."

The young man looked at his interlocutor.

"M. de Richelieu, of whom we were speaking just now," said Aramis, "was very blamable in the fixed idea he had of governing France unaided. He allowed two kings — King Louis XIII. and himself — to be seated upon the same throne, when he might have installed them more conveniently upon two separate thrones."

"Upon two thrones?" said the prince, thoughtfully.

"In fact," pursued Aramis, quietly, "a cardinal, prime minister of France, assisted by the favor and by the countenance of his Most Christian Majesty the King of France ; a cardinal to whom the king his master lends the treasures of the State, his army, his counsel, — such a man would be acting with twofold injustice in applying these mighty resources to France alone. Besides," added Aramis, with a searching look into the eyes of Philippe, "you will not be a king such as your father was, — delicate in health, slow in judgment, whom all things wearied ; you will be a king governing by your brain and by your sword. You would have in the government of the State no more than you could manage unaided ; I should only interfere with you. Besides, our friendship ought never to be, I do not say impaired, but even grazed by a secret thought. I shall have given you the throne of France ; you will confer on

me the throne of Saint Peter. Whenever your loyal, firm, and mailed hand shall have for its mate the hand of a pope such as I shall be, neither Charles V., who owned two thirds of the habitable globe, nor Charlemagne, who possessed it entirely, will reach to the height of your waist. I have no alliances ; I have no predilections. I will not throw you into persecutions of heretics, nor will I cast you into the troubled waters of family dissension ; I will simply say to you : The whole universe is for us two, — for me the minds of men, for you their bodies ; and as I shall be the first to die, you will have my inheritance. What do you say of my plan, Monseigneur ?”

“I say that you render me happy and proud, for no other reason than that of having comprehended you thoroughly. M. d’Herblay, you shall be cardinal, and when cardinal, my prime minister ; and then you will point out to me the necessary steps to be taken to secure your election as pope, and I will take them. You can ask what guarantees from me you please.”

“It is useless. I shall never act except in such a manner that you will be the gainer ; I shall never mount until I shall have first placed you upon the round of the ladder immediately above me ; I shall always hold myself sufficiently aloof from you to escape incurring your jealousy, sufficiently near to sustain your personal advantage and to watch over your friendship. All the contracts in the world are easily violated because the interest included in them inclines more to one side than to another. With us, however, it will never be the case ; I have no need of guarantees.”

“And so — my brother — will disappear ?”

“Simply. We will remove him from his bed by means of a plank which yields to the pressure of the finger. Having retired to rest as a crowned sovereign, he will

awaken in captivity. Alone, you will rule from that moment, and you will have no interest more urgent than that of keeping me near you."

"I believe it. There is my hand, M. d'Herblay."

"Allow me to kneel before you, Sire, most respectfully. We will embrace each other on the day when we shall both have on our temples — you the crown, and I the tiara."

"Embrace me this very day ; and be more than great, more than skilful, more than sublime in genius, — be good to me, be my father !"

Aramis was almost overcome as he listened to the voice of the prince. He fancied he detected in his own heart an emotion hitherto unknown to him ; but this impression was speedily removed. "His father !" he thought ; "yes, his Holy Father."

The two resumed their places in the carriage, which sped rapidly along the road leading to Vaux-le-Vicomte.



## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

## THE CHÂTEAU DE VAUX-LE-VICOMTE.

THE Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte, situated about a league from Melun, had been built by Fouquet in 1653. There was then but little money in France ; Mazarin had taken all that there was, and Fouquet had expended the remainder. However, as certain men have fertile faults and useful vices, Fouquet, in scattering broadcast millions of money in the construction of this palace, had found a means of bringing, as the result of his generous profusion, three illustrious men together, — Levau, the architect of the building ; Lenôtre, the designer of the gardens ; and Lebrun, the decorator of the apartments. If the Château de Vaux possessed a single fault with which it could be reproached, it was its grandiose, pretentious character. It is even at the present day proverbial to calculate the number of acres of roofing, the reparation of which would, in our age, be the ruin of fortunes cramped and narrowed as the epoch itself. Vaux-le-Vicomte, when its magnificent gates, supported by caryatides, have been passed through, has the principal front of the main building opening upon a vast court of honor, enclosed by deep ditches, bordered by a magnificent stone balustrade. Nothing could be more noble in appearance than the forecourt of the middle, raised upon the flight of steps, like a king upon his throne, having around it four pavilions forming the angles, the immense Ionic columns of which rise majestically to the whole height of the building. The friezes

ornamented with arabesques, and the pediments which crown the pilasters, confer richness and grace upon every part of the building, while the domes which surmount the whole add proportion and majesty. This mansion, built by a subject, bore a far greater resemblance to a royal residence than those that Wolsey fancied he must present to his master for fear of rendering him jealous. But if magnificence and splendor were displayed in any one particular part of this palace more than in another, — if anything could be preferred to the wonderful arrangement of the interior, to the sumptuousness of the gilding, and to the profusion of the paintings and statues, it would be the park and gardens of Vaux. The fountains, which were regarded as wonderful in 1653, are still so at the present time; the cascades awakened the admiration of kings and princes; and as for the famous grotto, the theme of so many poetical effusions, the residence of that illustrious nymph of Vaux, whom Pellisson made converse with La Fontaine, we must be spared the description of all its beauties. We will do as Despréaux did, — we will enter the park, the trees of which are of eight years' growth only, and whose summits, already superb, blushingly unfold their leaves to the earliest rays of the rising sun. Lenôtre had accelerated the pleasure of Mæcenas; all the nursery-grounds had furnished trees whose growth had been promoted by careful culture and fertilization. Every tree in the neighborhood which presented a fair appearance of beauty or stature, had been taken up by its roots and transplanted in the park. Fouquet could well afford to purchase trees to ornament his park, since he had bought up three villages and their appurtenances to increase its extent. M. de Scudéry said of this palace, that, for the purpose of keeping the grounds and gardens well watered, M. Fouquet had divided a river into a thou-

sand fountains, and gathered the waters of a thousand fountains into torrents. This same M. de Scudéry said a great many other things in his "Clélie," about this palace of Valterre, the charms of which he describes most minutely. We should be far wiser to send our curious readers to Vaux to judge for themselves than to refer them to the "Clélie;" and yet there are as many leagues from Paris to Vaux as there are volumes of the "Clélie."

This magnificent palace had been got ready for the reception of the greatest reigning sovereign of the time. M. Fouquet's friends had transported thither, some their actors and their dresses, others their troops of sculptors and artists; others still their ready-mended pens, — floods of impromptus were contemplated. The cascades, somewhat rebellious nymphs though they were, poured forth their waters brighter than crystal; they scattered over the bronze tritons and nereids their waves of foam, which glistened in the rays of the sun. An army of servants were hurrying to and fro in squadrons in the courtyard and corridors; while Fouquet, who had only that morning arrived, moved about with a calm, observant glance, giving his last orders, after his intendants had inspected everything.

It was, as we have said, the 15th of August. The sun poured down its burning rays upon the heathen deities of marble and bronze; it raised the temperature of the water in the conch shells, and ripened, on the walls, those magnificent peaches of which the king, fifty years later, spoke so regretfully when, at Marly, on an occasion of a scarcity of the finer sorts of peaches being complained of in the beautiful gardens there, — gardens which had cost France double the amount that had been expended on Vaux, — the *great king* observed to some one, "You are too young to have eaten any of M. Fouquet's peaches."

Oh, fame! Oh the blazonry of renown! Oh the glory of the earth! That very man whose judgment was so sound where merit was concerned,—he who had swept into his coffers the inheritance of Nicholas Fouquet, who had robbed him of Lenôtre and Lebrun, and had sent him to rot for the remainder of his life in one of the State prisons,—remembered only the peaches of that vanquished, crushed, forgotten enemy! It was to little purpose that Fouquet had squandered thirty million livres in the fountains of his gardens, in the crucibles of his sculptors, in the writing-desks of his literary friends, in the portfolios of his painters; vainly had he fancied that thereby he might be remembered. A peach—a blushing, rich-flavored fruit, nestling in the trellis-work on the garden-wall, hidden beneath its long green leaves,—this small vegetable production, that a dormouse would nibble up without a thought, was sufficient to recall to the memory of this great monarch the mournful shade of the last superintendent of France.

With a complete assurance that Aramis had made arrangements fairly to distribute the vast number of guests throughout the palace, and that he had not omitted to attend to any of the internal regulations for their comfort, Fouquet devoted his entire attention to the *ensemble*. In one direction Gourville showed him the preparations which had been made for the fireworks; in another, Molière led him over the theatre; at last, after he had visited the chapel, the salons, and the galleries, and was again going downstairs, exhausted with fatigue, Fouquet saw Aramis on the staircase. The prelate beckoned to him. The superintendent joined his friend, who paused before a large picture scarcely finished. Applying himself, heart and soul to his work, the painter, Lebrun, covered with perspiration, stained with paint, pale from

fatigue and inspiration, was putting the last finishing touches with his rapid brush. It was the portrait of the king, whom they were expecting, dressed in the court suit which Percerin had condescended to show beforehand to the Bishop of Vannes. Fouquet placed himself before this portrait, which seemed to live, as one might say, in the cool freshness of its flesh and in its warmth of color. He gazed upon it long and fixedly, estimated the prodigious labor that had been bestowed upon it, and not being able to find any recompense sufficiently great for this herculean effort, he passed his arm round the painter's neck, and embraced him. The superintendent, by this action, had ruined a suit of clothes worth a thousand pistoles, but he had invigorated Lebrun. It was a happy moment for the artist; it was an unhappy one for M. Percerin, who was walking behind Fouquet, and was engaged in admiring, in Lebrun's painting, the suit that he had made for his Majesty, — a perfect work of art, as he called it, which was not to be matched except in the wardrobe of the superintendent. His distress and his exclamations were interrupted by a signal which had been given from the summit of the mansion. In the direction of Melun, in the still empty, open plain, the sentinels of Vaux had perceived the advancing procession of the king and the queens. His Majesty was entering into Melun with his long train of carriages and cavaliers.

"In an hour —" said Aramis to Fouquet.

"In an hour!" replied the latter, sighing.

"And the people who ask one another what is the good of these royal *fêtes*!" continued the Bishop of Vannes, laughing with his forced smile.

"Alas! I, too, who am not the people, ask the same thing."

"I will answer you in four-and-twenty hours, Mon-



seigneur. Assume a cheerful countenance, for it is a day of joy."

"Well, believe me or not, as you like, D'Herblay," said the superintendent, with a swelling heart, pointing at the *cortége* of Louis, visible in the horizon, "the king certainly loves me but very little, nor do I care much for him ; but I cannot tell you how it is that since he is approaching my house —"

"Well, what ?"

"Well, then, since I know Louis is on his way hither, he is more sacred to me ; he is my king, he is almost dear to me."

"Dear ! — yes," said Aramis, playing upon the word, as the Abbé Terray did, at a later period, with Louis XV.

"Do not laugh, D'Herblay ; I feel that if he were really to wish it, I could love that young man."

"You should not say that to me," returned Aramis, "but rather to M. Colbert."

"To M. Colbert !" exclaimed Fouquet. "Why so ?"

"Because he would allow you a pension out of the king's privy purse, as soon as he becomes superintendent," said Aramis, preparing to leave as soon as he had dealt this last blow.

"Where are you going ?" returned Fouquet, with a gloomy look.

"To my own apartment, to change my costume, Monseigneur."

"Where are you lodging, D'Herblay ?"

"In the blue room on the second story."

"The room immediately over the king's room ?"

"Precisely."

"You will be subject to very great restraint there. What an idea to condemn yourself to a room where you cannot stir or move about !"



"During the night, Monseigneur, I sleep or read in my bed."

"And your servants?"

"I have only one person with me. I find my reader quite sufficient. Adieu, Monseigneur! Do not overfatigue yourself; keep yourself fresh for the arrival of the king."

"We shall see you by and by, I suppose, and your friend Du Vallon also?"

"He is lodging next to me, and is at this moment dressing."

Then Fouquet, bowing, with a smile passed on, like a commander-in-chief who pays the different outposts a visit after the enemy has been signalled.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

## THE WINE OF MELUN.

THE king had, in point of fact, entered Melun with the intention of merely passing through the city. The youthful monarch had an appetite for amusements. Only twice during the journey had he been able to catch a glimpse of La Vallière; and suspecting that his only opportunity of speaking to her would be after nightfall, in the gardens, and after the ceremonial of reception had been gone through, he had been very desirous to arrive at Vaux as early as possible. But he reckoned without his captain of the Musketeers and without M. Colbert. Like Calypso, who could not be consoled at the departure of Ulysses, our Gascon could not console himself for not having guessed why Aramis had asked Percerin to show him the king's new costumes. "There is not a doubt," he said to himself, "that my friend the Bishop of Vannes had some motive in that;" and then he began to rack his brains most uselessly. D'Artagnan, so intimately acquainted with all the court intrigues, who knew the position of Fouquet better even than Fouquet himself did, had conceived the strangest fancies and suspicions at the announcement of the *fête*, which would have ruined a wealthy man, and which became impossible, utter madness even, for a man so destitute as he was. And then, the presence of Aramis, who had returned from Belle-Isle, and been nominated by Fouquet inspector-general of all the arrangements; his perseverance in mixing himself up with all the superin-

tendent's affairs; his visit to Baisemeaux, — all this suspicious singularity of conduct had profoundly perplexed D'Artagnan during the last few weeks.

"With men of Aramis's stamp," he said, "one is never the stronger except with sword in hand. So long as Aramis continued a soldier, there was hope of getting the better of him; but since he has covered his cuirass with a stole, we are lost. But what can Aramis's object be?" and D'Artagnan plunged again into deep thought. "What does it matter to me, after all," he continued, "if his only object is to overthrow M. Colbert? And what else can he be after?" and D'Artagnan rubbed his forehead, — that fertile land, whence the ploughshare of his nails had turned up so many and such admirable ideas. He at first thought of talking the matter over with Colbert; but his friendship for Aramis, the oath of earlier days, bound him too strictly. He revolted at the bare idea of such a thing; and, besides, he hated the financier. He wished to unburden his mind to the king; but the king would not be able to understand the suspicions which had not even the solidity of a shadow. He resolved to address himself to Aramis directly, the first time he met him. "I will take him," said the musketeer, "between a couple of candles suddenly; I will place my hand upon his heart, and he will tell me — What will he tell me? Yes, he will tell me something; for, *mordieux!* there is something underneath."

Somewhat calmer, D'Artagnan made every preparation for the journey, and took the greatest care that the military household of the king, as yet very inconsiderable in numbers, should be well officered and well disciplined in its limited proportions. The result was that through the captain's arrangements the king, on arriving at Melun, saw himself at the head of the Musketeers, his Swiss

Guards, and a picket of the French Guards. It might almost have been called a small army. M. Colbert looked at the troops with great delight ; he even wished there had been a third more in number.

"But why?" said the king.

"To show greater honor to M. Fouquet," replied Colbert.

"To ruin him the sooner," thought D'Artagnan.

When this little army appeared before Melun, the chief magistrates came out to meet the king and to present him with the keys of the city, and invited him to enter the Hôtel de Ville to partake of the wine of honor. The king, who expected to pass through the city and to proceed to Vaux without delay, became quite red in the face from vexation.

"Who was fool enough to occasion this delay?" muttered the king, between his teeth, as the chief magistrate was in the middle of a long address.

"Not I, certainly," replied D'Artagnan ; "but I believe it was M. Colbert."

Colbert, having heard his name pronounced, said, "What was M. d'Artagnan good enough to say?"

"I was good enough to remark that it was you who stopped the king's progress, so that he might taste the *vin de Brie*. Was I right?"

"Quite so, Monsieur."

"In that case, then, it was you whom the king called some name or other."

"What name?"

"I hardly know ; but wait a moment, — 'idiot,' I think it was, — no, no, it was 'fool,' 'fool,' 'stupid.' That is what his Majesty said of the man who procured for him the wine of Melun."

D'Artagnan, after this broadside, quietly caressed his

horse. M. Colbert's large head seemed to become larger than ever. D'Artagnan, seeing how ugly anger made him, did not stop half-way. The orator still went on with his speech, while the king's color was visibly increasing. "*Mordieux!*" said the musketeer, coolly, "the king is going to have an attack of determination of blood to the head. Where the deuce did you get hold of that idea, M. Colbert? You have no luck!"

"Monsieur," said the financier, drawing himself up, "my zeal for the king's service inspired me with the idea."

"Bah!"

"Monsieur, Melun is a city, an excellent city, which pays well, and which it would be imprudent to displease."

"There now! I, who do not pretend to be a financier, saw only one idea in your idea."

"What was that, Monsieur?"

"That of causing a little annoyance to M. Fouquet, who is making himself quite giddy on his donjons yonder, in waiting for us."

This was a home-stroke, and a hard one. Colbert was confounded by it, and retired, thoroughly discomfited. Fortunately, the speech was now at an end. The king drank the wine which was presented to him, and then all resumed their course through the city. The king bit his lips in anger; for the evening was closing in, and all hope of a walk with La Vallière was over. In order that the whole of the king's household should enter Vaux, four hours at least were necessary, owing to the different arrangements. The king, therefore, who was boiling with impatience, hurried forward as much as possible, in order to arrive before nightfall. But at the moment he was setting off again, other and fresh difficulties arose.

“Is not the king going to sleep at Melun?” said Colbert, in a low tone of voice, to D’Artagnan.

M. Colbert must have been badly inspired that day, to address himself in that manner to the chief of the Musketeers; for the latter guessed that the king’s intention was very far from that of remaining where he was. D’Artagnan would not allow him to enter Vaux except he were well and strongly accompanied, and desired that his Majesty should not enter except with all the escort. On the other hand, he felt that these delays would irritate that impatient character beyond measure. In what way could he possibly reconcile these two difficulties? D’Artagnan took up Colbert’s remark, and determined to repeat it to the king.

“Sire,” he said, “M. Colbert has been asking me if your Majesty does not intend to sleep at Melun.”

“Sleep at Melun! What for?” exclaimed Louis XIV. “Sleep at Melun! Who, in Heaven’s name, can have thought of such a thing, when M. Fouquet is expecting us this evening?”

“It was simply,” returned Colbert, quickly, “the fear of causing your Majesty any delay; for, according to established etiquette, you cannot enter any place, with the exception of your own royal residences, until the soldiers’ quarters have been marked out by the quartermaster, and the garrison has been properly distributed.”

D’Artagnan listened with the greatest attention, biting his mustache; and the queens listened attentively also. They were fatigued, and would have liked to go to rest without proceeding any farther, and especially to prevent the king from walking about in the evening with M. de Saint-Aignan and the ladies of the court; for if etiquette required the princesses to remain within their own rooms, the ladies of honor, as soon as they had performed the



services required of them, had no restrictions placed upon them, but were at liberty to walk<sup>s</sup> about as they pleased. It will easily be conjectured that all these rival interests, gathering together in vapors, must necessarily produce clouds, and that the clouds would be followed by a tempest. The king had no mustache to gnaw, and therefore kept biting the handle of his whip instead, with ill-concealed impatience. How could he get out of it? D'Artagnan looked as agreeable as possible, and Colbert as sulky as he could. Who was there, then, with whom Louis could get in a passion?

"We will consult the queen," said Louis XIV., bowing to the royal ladies.

This kindness of consideration softened Maria Theresa's heart, who was of a kind and generous disposition, and who, left to her own free will, replied: "I shall be delighted to do whatever your Majesty wishes."

"How long will it take us to get to Vaux?" inquired Anne of Austria, in slow and measured accents, placing her hand upon her suffering bosom.

"An hour for your Majesties' carriages," said D'Artagnan; "the roads are tolerably good."

The king looked at him. "And a quarter of an hour for the king," he hastened to add.

"We should arrive by daylight," said Louis XIV.

"But the billeting of the king's military escort," objected Colbert, softly, "will make his Majesty lose all the advantage of his speed, however quick he may be."

"Double ass that you are!" thought D'Artagnan; "if I had any interest or motive in demolishing your credit, I could do it in ten minutes. If I were in the king's place," he added, aloud, "I should, in going to M. Fouquet, leave my escort behind me. I should go to him as a friend; I should enter accompanied only by my captain

of the Guards. I should consider that I was acting more nobly, and should be invested with a still more sacred character by doing so."

Delight sparkled in the king's eyes. "That is, indeed, a very good suggestion. We will go to see a friend as friends. Those gentlemen who are with the carriages can go slowly; but we who are mounted — Forward!" and he rode off, accompanied by all those who were mounted.

Colbert hid his ugly head behind his horse's neck.

"I shall be quits," said D'Artagnan, as he galloped along, "by getting a little talk with Aramis this evening. And then, M. Fouquet is a man of honor. *Mordieux!* I have said so, and it must be so."

In this way, towards seven o'clock in the evening, without trumpets, without advanced guard, without outriders or musketeers, the king presented himself before the gate of Vaux, where Fouquet, who had been informed of his royal guest's approach, had been waiting for the last half-hour, with his head uncovered, surrounded by his household and his friends.

## CHAPTER XL.

## NECTAR AND AMBROSIA.

FOUQUET held the stirrup of the king, who having dismounted bowed graciously, and more graciously still held out his hand to him, which Fouquet, in spite of a slight resistance on the king's part, carried respectfully to his lips. The king wished to wait in the first courtyard for the arrival of the carriages; nor had he long to wait. For the roads had been put into excellent order by the superintendent, and a stone would hardly have been found of the size of an egg the whole way from Melun to Vaux; so that the carriages, rolling along as though on a carpet, brought the ladies to Vaux, without jolting or fatigue, by eight o'clock. They were received by Madame Fouquet; and at the moment when they made their appearance, a light as bright as day burst forth from all the trees and vases and marble statues. This species of enchantment lasted until their Majesties had retired into the palace. All these wonders and magical effects, — which the chronicler has heaped up, or rather preserved, in his recital at the risk of rivalling the creations of a romancist, — these splendors whereby night seemed conquered and Nature corrected, together with every delight and luxury combined for the satisfaction of all the senses as well as of the mind, Fouquet really offered to his sovereign in that enchanting retreat, to which no monarch could at that time boast of possessing an equal.

We do not intend to describe the grand banquet, at which all the royal guests were present, nor the concerts, nor the fairy-like and magical transformations and metamorphoses. It will be enough for our purpose to depict the countenance which the king assumed, and which, from being gay, soon wore a gloomy, constrained, and irritated expression. He remembered his own residence, and the mean style of luxury which prevailed there, — which comprised only that which was merely useful for the royal wants, without being his own personal property. The large vases of the Louvre, the old furniture and plate of Henry II., of Francis I., of Louis XI., were merely historical monuments, — they were nothing but specimens of art, relics left by his predecessors; while with Fouquet the value of the article was as much in the workmanship as in the article itself. Fouquet ate from a gold service, which artists in his own employ had modelled and cast for him. Fouquet drank wines of which the King of France did not even know the name, and drank them out of goblets each more precious than the whole royal cellar.

What, too, could be said of the apartments, the hangings, the pictures, the servants and officers of every description, in Fouquet's household? What could be said of the mode of service in which etiquette was replaced by order, stiff formality by personal unrestrained comfort, and the happiness and contentment of the guest became the supreme law of all who obeyed the host? The swarm of busily engaged persons moving about noiselessly; the multitude of guests, who were, however, even less numerous than the servants who waited on them; the myriads of exquisitely prepared dishes, of gold and silver vases; the floods of dazzling light; the masses of unknown flowers, of which the hothouses had been despoiled, redundant with the luxuriance of unequalled beauty, — the harmony

of all, which indeed was no more than the prelude of the promised *fête*, charmed all the guests, who testified their admiration over and over again, not by voice or gesture, but by deep silence and rapt attention, — those two languages of the courtier which acknowledge the hand of no master powerful enough to restrain them.

As for the king, his eyes filled with tears ; he dared not look at the queen. Anne of Austria, whose pride, as it ever had been, was superior to that of any creature breathing, overwhelmed her host by the contempt with which she treated everything handed to her. The young queen, kind-hearted by nature and curious by disposition, praised Fouquet, ate with an exceedingly good appetite, and asked the names of the different fruits which were placed upon the table. Fouquet replied that he did not know their names. The fruits came from his own stores ; he had often cultivated them himself, having an intimate acquaintance with the cultivation of exotic fruits and plants. The king felt and appreciated the delicacy of the reply, but was only the more humiliated at it ; he thought that the queen was a little too familiar in her manners, and that Anne of Austria resembled Juno a little too much ; his chief anxiety, however, was that he might remain cold and distant in his behavior, bordering slightly on the limits of extreme disdain or of simple admiration.

Fouquet had foreseen all that ; he was, in fact, one of those men who foresee everything. The king had expressly declared that so long as he remained under Fouquet's roof he did not wish his own different repasts to be served in accordance with the usual etiquette, and that he would consequently dine with the rest of the company ; but by the thoughtful attention of the superintendent the king's dinner was served up separately, if one may so express it, in the middle of the general table. The

dinner, wonderful in every respect, from the dishes of which it was composed, comprised everything the king liked, and which he generally preferred to anything else. Louis had no excuse — he, indeed, who had the keenest appetite in his kingdom — for saying that he was not hungry. Fouquet even did better still: he indeed, in obedience to the king's expressed desire, seated himself at the table; but as soon as the soups were served, he rose and personally waited on the king, while Madame Fouquet stood behind the queen-mother's arm-chair. The disdain of Juno and the sulky fits of temper of Jupiter could not resist this exhibition of kindly feeling and polite attention. The queen ate a biscuit dipped in a glass of San-Lucar wine; and the king ate of everything, saying to Fouquet, "It is impossible, Monsieur the Superintendent, to dine better anywhere." Whereupon the whole court began, on all sides, to devour the dishes spread before them, with such enthusiasm that it looked like a cloud of Egyptian locusts settling down upon the uncut crops.

As soon, however, as his hunger was appeased, the king became dull and gloomy again; the more so in proportion to the satisfaction he fancied he had manifested, and particularly on account of the deferential manner which his courtiers had shown towards Fouquet. D'Artagnan, who ate a good deal and drank but little, without allowing it to be noticed, did not lose a single opportunity, but made a great number of observations which he turned to good profit.

When the supper was finished, the king expressed a wish not to lose the promenade. The park was illuminated; the moon, too, as if she had placed herself at the orders of the Lord of Vaux, silvered the trees and lakes with her bright phosphoric light. The air was soft and balmy; the gravelled walks through the thickly set ave-



nues yielded luxuriously to the feet. The *fête* was complete in every respect ; for the king, having met La Vallière in one of the winding paths of the wood, was able to press her by the hand and say, "I love you," without any one overhearing him, except M. d'Artagnan who followed, and M. Fouquet who preceded him.

The night of enchantments stole on. The king having requested to be shown to his room, there was immediately a movement in every direction. The queens passed to their own apartments, accompanied by the music of theorbos and flutes. The king found his musketeers awaiting him on the grand flight of steps ; for Fouquet had brought them on from Melun, and had invited them to supper. D'Artagnan's suspicions at once disappeared. He was weary ; he had supped well, and wished, for once in his life, thoroughly to enjoy a *fête* given by a man who was in every sense of the word a king. "M. Fouquet," he said, "is the man for me."

The king was conducted with the greatest ceremony to the chamber of Morpheus, of which we owe some slight description to our readers. It was the handsomest and the largest in the palace. Lebrun had painted on the vaulted ceiling the happy as well as disagreeable dreams with which Morpheus affects kings as well as other men : with everything lovely to which sleep gives birth, — its perfumes, its flowers and nectar, the wild voluptuousness or deep repose of the senses, — had the painter enriched his frescos. It was a composition as soft and pleasing in one part as dark and terrible in another. The poisoned chalice ; the glittering dagger suspended over the head of the sleeper ; wizards and phantoms with hideous masks, those dim shadows more terrific than the brightness of flame or the blackness of night, — these he had made the companions of his more pleasing pictures.

No sooner had the king entered the room than a cold shiver seemed to pass through him ; and when Fouquet asked him the cause of it, the king replied, turning pale, "I am sleepy."

"Does your Majesty wish for your attendants at once?"

"No ; I have to talk with a few persons first," said the king. "Will you have the goodness to summon M. Colbert?"

Fouquet bowed, and left the room.

## CHAPTER XLI.

## A GASCON, AND A GASCON AND A HALF.

D'ARTAGNAN had lost no time ; in fact, he was not in the habit of doing so. After having inquired for Aramis, he had looked for him in every direction until he had succeeded in finding him. Now, no sooner had the king entered Vaux than Aramis had retired to his own room, meditating doubtless some new piece of gallant attention for his Majesty's amusement. D'Artagnan desired the servants to announce him, and found on the second story, in a beautiful room called the blue room on account of the color of its hangings, the Bishop of Vannes in company with Porthos and several of the modern Epicureans. Aramis came forward to embrace his friend, and offered him the best seat. As it was after a while generally remarked among those present that the musketeer was reserved, apparently wishing for an opportunity to converse privately with Aramis, the Epicureans took their leave. Porthos, however, did not stir ; having dined exceedingly well, he was fast asleep in his arm-chair, and the freedom of conversation therefore was not interrupted by a third person. Porthos had a deep, harmonious snore ; and people might talk in the midst of its loud bass without fear of disturbing him.

D'Artagnan felt that he was called upon to open the conversation. The encounter he had come to seek would be rough ; so he delicately approached the subject. " Well, and so we have come to Vaux," he said.

"Why, yes, D'Artagnan. And how do you like the place?"

"Very much; and I like M. Fouquet also."

"Is he not a charming host?"

"No one could be more so."

"I am told that the king began by being very distant in his manner towards M. Fouquet, but that his Majesty became much more cordial afterwards."

"You did not notice it, then, since you say you have been told so?"

"No; I was engaged with those gentlemen who have just left the room about the theatrical performances and the tournament which are to take place to-morrow."

"Ah, indeed! you are the comptroller-general of the *fêtes* here, then?"

"You know I am a friend of all kinds of amusement where the exercise of the imagination is required; I have always been a poet in one way or another."

"Yes, I remember the verses you used to write; they were charming."

"I have forgotten them; but I am delighted to read the verses of others, when those others are known by the names of Molière, Pellisson, La Fontaine, etc."

"Do you know what idea occurred to me this evening, Aramis?"

"No; tell me what it was, for I should never be able to guess it, you have so many."

"Well, the idea occurred to me that the true king of France is not Louis XIV."

"What!" said Aramis, involuntarily, looking the musketeer full in the eyes.

"No; it is M. Fouquet."

Aramis breathed again, and smiled. "Ah! you are like all the rest, — jealous," he said. "I would wager

that it was M. Colbert who turned that pretty phrase."

D'Artagnan, in order to throw Aramis off his guard, related Colbert's misadventures with regard to the *vin de Melun*.

"He comes of a mean race, does Colbert," said Aramis.

"Quite true."

"When I think, too," added the bishop, "that that fellow will be your minister within four months, and that you will serve him as blindly as you did Richelieu or Mazarin —"

"And as you serve M. Fouquet," said D'Artagnan.

"With this difference, though, that M. Fouquet is not M. Colbert."

"True, true," said D'Artagnan, as he pretended to become sad and full of reflection; and then, a moment after, he added, "Why do you tell me that M. Colbert will be minister in four months?"

"Because M. Fouquet will have ceased to be so," replied Aramis.

"He will be ruined, you mean?" said D'Artagnan.

"Completely so."

"Why does he give these *fêtes*, then?" said the musketeer, in a tone so full of thoughtful consideration, so natural, that the bishop was for the moment deceived by it. "Why did you not dissuade him from it?"

The latter part of the sentence was just a little too much, and Aramis's former suspicions were again aroused. "It is done with the object of humoring the king."

"By ruining himself?"

"Yes, by ruining himself for the king."

"A singular calculation that!"

"Necessity."

"I don't see that, dear Aramis."

"Do you not? Have you not remarked M. Colbert's daily increasing antagonism, and that he is doing his utmost to drive the king to get rid of the superintendent?"

"One must be blind not to see it."

"And that a cabal is formed against M. Fouquet?"

"That is well known."

"What likelihood is there that the king would join a party formed against a man who will have spent everything he had to please him?"

"True, true," said D'Artagnan slowly, hardly convinced, yet curious to broach another phase of the conversation. "There are follies and follies," he resumed; "and I do not like those you are committing."

"To what do you allude?"

"As for the banquet, the ball, the concert, the theatricals, the tournaments, the cascades, the fireworks, the illuminations, and the presents, — these are all well and good, I grant; but why were not these expenses sufficient? Was it necessary to refurnish the entire house?"

"You are quite right. I told M. Fouquet that myself. He replied, that if he were rich enough he would offer the king a château new from the vanes at the top of the house to the very cellar, completely new inside and out; and that as soon as the king had left, he would burn the whole building and its contents, in order that it might not be made use of by any one else."

"How completely Spanish!"

"I told him so, and he then added this: 'Whoever advises me to spare expense, I shall look upon as my enemy.'"

"It is positive madness; and that portrait too!"

"What portrait?" said Aramis.

"That of the king; that surprise."

"That surprise?"



"Yes, for which you procured some samples at Percerin's." D'Artagnan paused. The shaft was discharged, and all he had to do was to wait and watch its effect.

"That is merely an act of graceful attention," replied Aramis.

D'Artagnan went up to his friend, took hold of both his hands, and looking him full in the eyes said, "Aramis, do you still care for me a little?"

"What a question to ask!"

"Very good. One favor, then. Why did you take some samples of the king's costumes at Percerin's?"

"Come with me and ask poor Lebrun, who has been working upon them for the last two days and two nights."

"Aramis, that may be the truth for everybody else; but for me —"

"Upon my word, D'Artagnan, you astonish me."

"Be a little considerate for me. Tell me the exact truth; you would not like anything disagreeable to happen to me, would you?"

"My dear friend, you are becoming quite incomprehensible. What devil of a suspicion have you, then?"

"Do you believe in my instincts? Formerly you had faith in them. Well, then, an instinct tells me that you have some concealed project on foot."

"I — a project?"

"I am not sure of it."

"What nonsense!"

"I am not sure of it, but I would swear to it."

"Indeed, D'Artagnan, you cause me the greatest pain. Is it likely, if I have any project in hand that I ought to keep secret from you, I shall tell you about it? If I had one that I ought to reveal to you, I should have already told it to you."

"No, Aramis, no. There are certain projects which are never revealed until the favorable opportunity arrives."

"In that case, my dear fellow," returned the bishop, laughing, "the only thing now is, that the 'opportunity' has not yet arrived."

D'Artagnan shook his head with a sorrowful expression. "Oh, friendship, friendship!" he said, "what an idle word! Here is a man who, if I were but to ask it, would suffer himself to be cut in pieces for my sake."

"You are right," said Aramis, nobly.

"And this man, who would shed every drop of blood in his veins for me, will not open the smallest corner of his heart. Friendship, I repeat, is nothing but a shadow and a delusion, like everything else that shines in this world."

"It is not thus you should speak of our friendship," replied the bishop, in a firm, assured voice; "for ours is not of the same nature as those of which you have been speaking!"

"Look at us, Aramis! We are three out of the four. You are deceiving me, I suspect you, and Porthos sleeps; an admirable trio of friends, don't you think so?—a beautiful relic!"

"I can only tell you one thing, D'Artagnan, and I swear it on the Bible: I love you just as much as formerly. If I ever distrust you, it is on account of others, and not on account of either of us. In everything I may do and succeed in, you will find your share. Will you promise me the same favor?"

"If I am not mistaken, Aramis, these words of yours, at the moment you pronounce them, are full of generous intention."

"That is true."

"You are conspiring against M. Colbert. If that be all,

*mordieux* ! tell me so at once. I have the instrument, and will pull out the tooth."

Aramis could not restrain a smile of disdain which passed across his noble features. "And supposing that I were conspiring against Colbert, what harm would there be in that?"

"No, no; that would be too trifling a matter for you to take in hand, and it was not on that account you asked Percerin for those samples of the king's costumes. Oh, Aramis, we are not enemies, we are brothers! Tell me what you wish to undertake, and, upon the word of D'Artagnan, if I cannot help you, I will swear to remain neutral."

"I am undertaking nothing," said Aramis.

"Aramis, a voice speaks within me, and seems to enlighten my darkness; it is a voice which has never yet deceived me. It is the king you are conspiring against."

"The king!" exclaimed the bishop, pretending to be annoyed.

"Your face will not convince me. The king, I repeat."

"Will you help me?" said Aramis, smiling ironically.

"Aramis, I will do more than help you, — I will do more than remain neutral, — I will save you."

"You are mad, D'Artagnan."

"I am the wiser of the two, in this matter."

"You to suspect me of wishing to assassinate the king!"

"Who spoke of that at all?" said the musketeer.

"Well, let us understand each other. I do not see what any one can do to a legitimate king as ours is, if he does not assassinate him." D'Artagnan did not say a word. "Besides, you have your guards and your musketeers here," said the bishop.

"True."

"You are not in M. Fouquet's house, but in your own. You have at the present moment M. Colbert, who counsels the king against M. Fouquet all which perhaps you would wish to advise if I were not on his side."

"Aramis ! Aramis ! for mercy's sake, one word as a friend !"

"A friend's word is the truth itself. If I think of touching, even with my finger, the son of Anne of Austria, the true king of this realm of France ; if I have not the firm intention of prostrating myself before his throne ; if, according to my wishes, to-morrow here at Vaux will not be the most glorious day my king ever enjoyed, — may Heaven's lightning blast me where I stand !" Aramis had pronounced these words with his face turned towards the alcove of his bedroom, where D'Artagnan, seated with his back towards the alcove, could not suspect that any one was lying concealed. The earnestness of his words, the studied slowness with which he pronounced them, the solemnity of his oath, gave the musketeer the most complete satisfaction. He took hold of both Aramis's hands, and shook them cordially. Aramis had endured reproaches without turning pale ; he blushed as he listened to words of praise. D'Artagnan, deceived, did him honor ; but D'Artagnan, trustful and reliant, made him feel ashamed. "Are you going away ?" he said, as he embraced his friend in order to conceal the flush on his own face.

"Yes ; my duty summons me. I have to get the watchword."

"Where are you lodged ?"

"In the king's anteroom. And Porthos ?"

"Take him away with you if you like, for he snores like a park of artillery."

"Ah ! he does not stay with you, then ?" said the captain.

"Not at all. He has his room to himself, but I don't know where."

"Very good!" said the musketeer, from whom this separation of the two associates removed his last suspicion; and he touched Porthos roughly on the shoulder. The latter replied by a yawn. "Come!" said D'Artagnan.

"What! D'Artagnan, my dear fellow, is that you? What a lucky chance! Oh, yes, — true; I am at the *fête* at Vaux."

"With your fine suit?"

"Yes; it was very attentive on the part of M. Coquelin de Volière, was it not?"

"Hush!" said Aramis. "You are walking so heavily that you will make the flooring give way."

"True," said the musketeer; "this room is above the dome."

"And I did not choose it for a fencing-room, I assure you," added the bishop. "The ceiling of the king's room has all the sweetness and calm delights of sleep. Do not forget, therefore, that my flooring is merely the covering of his ceiling. Good-night, my friends! In ten minutes I shall be fast asleep;" and Aramis accompanied them to the door, smiling pleasantly.

As soon as they were outside, Aramis bolted the door hurriedly, closed up the chinks of the windows, and then called out, "Monseigneur! Monseigneur!"

Philippe made his appearance from the alcove, pushing aside a sliding panel placed behind the bed. "M. d'Artagnan entertains a great many suspicions, it seems," he said.

"Ah! you recognized M. d'Artagnan, then?"

"Before you called him by his name, even."

"He is your captain of Musketeers."

"He is very devoted to *me*," replied Philippe, laying a stress upon the personal pronoun.

"As faithful as a dog; but he bites sometimes. If D'Artagnan does not recognize you before *the other* has disappeared, rely upon D'Artagnan to the end of the world; for in that case, if he has seen nothing, he will keep his fidelity. If he sees, when it is too late, he is a Gascon, and will never admit that he has been deceived."

"I thought so. What are we to do, now?"

"You will go and take up your post at our place of observation, and watch the moment of the king's retiring to rest, so as to learn how that ceremony is performed."

"Very good. Where shall I place myself?"

"Sit down on this folding-chair! I am going to push aside a portion of the flooring; you will look through the opening, which answers to one of the false windows made in the dome of the king's apartment. Can you see?"

"Yes," said Philippe, starting as at the sight of an enemy; "I see the king!"

"What is he doing?"

"He seems to wish some man to sit down close to him."

"M. Fouquet!"

"No, no; wait a moment —"

"The notes, my Prince, the portraits!"

"The man whom the king wishes to sit down in his presence is M. Colbert."

"Colbert sit down in the king's presence!" exclaimed Aramis; "it is impossible."

"Look!"

Aramis looked through the opening in the flooring. "Yes," he said, "Colbert himself! Oh, Monseigneur! what are we about to hear, and what can result from this intimacy?"

"Nothing good for M. Fouquet, at all events."



The prince was not mistaken.

We have seen that Louis XIV. had sent for Colbert, and that Colbert had arrived. The conversation began between them by the king's according to him one of the highest favors that he had ever given, — it is true that the king was alone with his subject, — “Colbert,” said he, “sit down !”

The intendant, overcome with delight, for he had feared he should be dismissed, refused this unprecedented honor.

“Does he accept ?” said Aramis.

“No ; he remains standing.”

“Let us listen, then ;” and the future king and the future pope listened eagerly to the simple mortals whom they beheld under their feet in a position to crush them if they had liked.

“Colbert,” said the king, “you have annoyed me exceedingly to-day.”

“I know it, Sire.”

“Very good ; I like that answer. Yes, you knew it, and there was courage in doing it.”

“I ran the risk of displeasing your Majesty, but I risked also concealing what were your true interests from you.”

“What ! you were afraid of something on my account ?”

“I was, Sire, even if it were of nothing more than an indigestion,” said Colbert ; “for one does not give his king such banquets as that of to-day, except it be to stifle him under the weight of good living.”

Colbert awaited the effect of this coarse jest upon the king ; and Louis XIV., who was the vainest and the most fastidiously delicate man in his kingdom, forgave Colbert his pleasantry. “The truth is,” he said, “that M. Fouquet has given me too good a meal. Tell me, Colbert, where does he get all the money required for this enormous expenditure, — can you tell ?”

"Yes, I know, Sire."

"You will show me?"

"Easily; to the very farthing."

"I know you are very exact."

"It is the principal qualification required in an intendant of finances."

"But all are not so."

"I thank your Majesty for a compliment so flattering from your lips."

"M. Fouquet, then, is rich, very rich; and I suppose every man knows he is so."

"Every one, Sire, — the living as well as the dead."

"What does that mean, M. Colbert?"

"The living are witnesses of M. Fouquet's wealth, — they admire and applaud the result produced; but the dead, wiser than we, know its sources, and they accuse him."

"So that M. Fouquet owes his wealth to certain sources?"

"The occupation of an intendant very often favors those who engage in it."

"You have something to say to me more confidentially, I perceive; do not be afraid, we are quite alone."

"I am never afraid of anything under the shelter of my own conscience and under the protection of your Majesty," said Colbert, bowing.

"If the dead, therefore, were to speak —"

"They do speak sometimes, Sire. Read!"

"Ah!" murmured Aramis in the prince's ear, who close beside him listened without losing a syllable, "since you are placed here, Monseigneur, in order to learn the vocation of a king, listen to a piece of infamy truly royal. You are about to be a witness of one of those scenes which God alone, or rather which the devil alone, can conceive

and execute. Listen attentively, — you will find your advantage in it.”

The prince redoubled his attention, and saw Louis XIV. take from Colbert’s hand a letter which the latter held out to him.

“The late cardinal’s handwriting,” said the king.

“Your Majesty has an excellent memory,” replied Colbert, bowing; “it is an immense advantage for a king who is destined for hard work to recognize handwritings at the first glance.”

The king read Mazarin’s letter; but as its contents are already known to the reader, in consequence of the misunderstanding between Madame de Chevreuse and Aramis, nothing further would be learned if we stated them here again.

“I do not quite understand,” said the king, greatly interested.

“Your Majesty has not yet acquired the habit of going through the public accounts.”

“I see that it refers to money which had been given to M. Fouquet.”

“Thirteen millions, — a tolerably good sum.”

“Yes. Well, and these thirteen millions are wanting to balance the total of the accounts? That is what I do not very well understand. How was this deficit possible?”

“Possible, I do not say; but there is no doubt about its reality.”

“You say that these thirteen millions are found to be wanting in the accounts?”

“I do not say so; but the registry does.”

“And this letter of M. Mazarin indicates the employment of that sum, and the name of the person with whom it was deposited?”

“As your Majesty can judge for yourself.”

“Yes; and the result is, then, that M. Fouquet has not yet restored the thirteen millions.”

“That results from the accounts, certainly, Sire.”

“Well, and consequently —”

“Well, Sire, consequently, inasmuch as M. Fouquet has not given back the thirteen millions, he must have appropriated them to his own purposes; and with those thirteen millions one could incur four times and a fraction as much expense and display as your Majesty was able to do at Fontainebleau, where we spent only three millions altogether, if you remember.”

For a blunderer, the souvenir he had evoked was a very skilfully contrived piece of baseness; for in remembering his own *fête* the king, thanks to a word of Fouquet, had for the first time perceived its inferiority. Colbert received at Vaux what Fouquet had given him at Fontainebleau; and as a good financier, he returned it with the best possible interest. Having once disposed the king's mind in that way, Colbert had nothing further to accomplish. He perceived it; the king had become gloomy. Colbert awaited the first word from the king's lips with as much impatience as Philippe and Aramis did from their place of observation.

“Are you aware what is the natural consequence of all this, M. Colbert?” said the king, after a few moments' reflection.

“No, Sire, I do not know.”

“Well, then, the fact of the appropriation of the thirteen millions, if it can be proved —”

“But it is so already.”

“I mean if it were to be declared, M. Colbert.”

“I think it will be to-morrow, if your Majesty —”

“Were we not under M. Fouquet's roof, you were going

to say, perhaps," replied the king, with something of nobleness in his manner.

"The king is in his own palace wherever he may be, and especially in houses for which his own money has paid."

"I think," said Philippe, in a low tone to Aramis, "that the architect who constructed this dome ought, anticipating what use could be made of it, so to have contrived that it might easily be made to fall on the heads of scoundrels such as that M. Colbert."

"I thought so, too," replied Aramis; "but M. Colbert is so very near the king at this moment."

"That is true, and that would open the succession."

"Of which your younger brother would reap all the advantage, Monseigneur. But, stay! let us keep quiet and listen."

"We shall not have long to listen," said the young prince.

"Why not, Monseigneur?"

"Because, if I were the king, I should not say anything further."

"And what would you do?"

"I should wait until to-morrow morning to give myself time for reflection."

Louis XIV. at last raised his eyes, and finding Colbert attentively waiting for his next remark, said, hastily changing the conversation, "M. Colbert, I perceive it is getting very late, and I shall now retire to bed."

"Ah!" said Colbert, "I should have —"

"Till to-morrow. By to-morrow morning I shall have made up my mind."

"Very good, Sire," returned Colbert, greatly incensed, although he restrained himself in the presence of the king.

The king made a gesture of adieu, and Colbert withdrew with a respectful bow. "My attendants!" cried the king; and they entered the apartment.

Philippe was about to quit his post of observation.

"A moment longer," said Aramis to him, with his accustomed gentleness of manner. "What has just now taken place is only a detail, and to-morrow we shall have no occasion to think anything more about it; but the ceremony of the king's retiring to rest, the etiquette observed in undressing the king, — that, indeed, is important. Learn, Sire, and study well how you ought to go to bed. Look! look!"



## CHAPTER XLII.

COLBERT.

HISTORY will tell us, or rather history has told us, of the various events of the following day, — of the splendid *fêtes* given by the superintendent to his sovereign. There was nothing but amusement and delight throughout the whole of the following day : there was a promenade, a banquet, a comedy, in which to his great amazement Porthos recognized “M. Coquelin de Volière” as one of the actors, in the piece called “Les Fâcheux.”

Full of preoccupation after the scene of the previous evening, and hardly recovered from the effects of the poison which Colbert had then administered to him, the king during the whole of the day, so brilliant in its effects, so full of unexpected and startling novelties, in which all the wonders of the “Arabian Nights’ Entertainments” seemed to be reproduced for his especial amusement, — the king, we say, showed himself cold, reserved, and taciturn. Nothing could smooth the frowns upon his face ; every one who observed him noticed that a deep feeling of resentment, of remote origin, increased by slow degrees, as the source becomes a river, thanks to the thousand threads of water which increase its body, was keenly alive in the depths of the king’s heart. Towards the middle of the day only did he begin to resume a little serenity of manner ; by that time he had, in all probability, made up his mind. Aramis, who followed him step by step in his thoughts as in his walk, con-

cluded that the event which he was expecting would soon occur.

This time Colbert seemed to walk in concert with the Bishop of Vannes; and had he received for every annoyance which he inflicted on the king a word of direction from Aramis, he could not have done better. During the whole of the day the king, who in all probability wished to free himself from some of the thoughts which disturbed his mind, seemed to seek La Vallière's society as actively as he sought to avoid that of M. Colbert or M. Fouquet.

The evening came. The king had expressed a wish not to walk in the park until after cards in the evening. In the interval between supper and the promenade, cards and dice were introduced. The king won a thousand pistoles, and having won them put them in his pocket, and then rose, saying, "And now, gentlemen, to the park." He found the ladies of the court already there. The king, we have before observed, had won a thousand pistoles, and had put them in his pocket. But M. Fouquet had somehow contrived to lose ten thousand; so that among the courtiers there was still left a hundred and ninety thousand livres' profit to divide, — a circumstance which made the countenances of the courtiers and the officers of the king's household the most joyous in the world. It was not the same, however, with the king's face; for notwithstanding his success at play, to which he was by no means insensible, there still remained a slight shade of dissatisfaction.

Colbert was waiting for him at the corner of one of the avenues; he was most probably waiting there by appointment, as Louis XIV., who had avoided him or who had seemed to avoid him, suddenly made him a sign, and they then struck into the depths of the park together.

But La Vallière, too, had observed the king's gloomy

aspect and kindling glances. She had remarked this; and as nothing which lay hidden or smouldering in his heart was impenetrable to her affection, she understood that this repressed wrath menaced some one. She put herself upon the road of vengeance, like an angel of mercy. Overcome by sadness, nervously agitated, deeply distressed at having been so long separated from her lover, disturbed at the sight of that emotion which she had divined, she presented herself to the king with an embarrassed aspect, which in his evil mood the king interpreted unfavorably. Then, as they were alone, or nearly alone, — inasmuch as Colbert, as soon as he perceived the young girl approaching, had stopped and drawn back a dozen paces, — the king advanced towards La Vallière and took her by the hand. “Mademoiselle,” he said to her, “should I be guilty of an indiscretion if I were to inquire if you are indisposed? You seem to breathe as if you were distressed, and your eyes are filled with tears.”

“Oh, Sire, if I am distressed, and if my eyes are full of tears, it is for the sadness of your Majesty.”

“My sadness? You are mistaken, Mademoiselle; no, it is not sadness I experience.”

“What is it, then, Sire?”

“Humiliation.”

“Humiliation? Oh, Sire, what a word for you to use!”

“I mean, Mademoiselle, that wherever I may happen to be, no one else ought to be the master. Well, then, look round you on every side, and judge whether I am not eclipsed — I, the King of France — before the king of these wide domains. Oh!” he continued, clinching his hands and teeth, “when I think that this king — ”

“Well, Sire?” said Louise, terrified.

“That this king is a faithless, unworthy servant, who becomes proud with my stolen property — And there-

fore am I about to change this impudent minister's *fête* into a sorrow and mourning of which the nymph of Vaux, as the poets say, shall not soon lose the remembrance."

"Oh! your Majesty —"

"Well, Mademoiselle, are you about to take M. Fouquet's part?" said Louis, impatiently.

"No, Sire; I will only ask whether you are well informed. Your Majesty has more than once learned the value of accusations made at court."

Louis XIV. made a sign for Colbert to approach. "Speak, M. Colbert," said the young king; "for I almost believe that Mademoiselle de la Vallière has need of your assurance before she can put any faith in the king's word. Tell Mademoiselle what M. Fouquet has done; and you, Mademoiselle, will perhaps have the kindness to listen. It will not be long."

Why did Louis XIV. insist upon it in such a manner? For a very simple reason, — his heart was not at rest; his mind was not thoroughly convinced; he imagined there was some dark, hidden, tortuous intrigue concealed beneath these thirteen million livres; and he wished that the pure heart of La Vallière, which had revolted at the idea of a theft or robbery, should approve, even were it only by a single word, the resolution which he had taken, and which, nevertheless, he hesitated about carrying into execution.

"Speak, Monsieur," said La Vallière to Colbert, who had advanced; "speak, since the king wishes me to listen to you. Tell me, what is the crime with which M. Fouquet is charged?"

"Oh, not very heinous, Mademoiselle," he returned, — "a simple abuse of confidence."

"Speak, speak, Colbert; and when you shall have re-

lated it, leave us, and go and inform M. d'Artagnan that I have orders to give him."

"M. d'Artagnan, Sire!" exclaimed La Vallière; "but why send for M. d'Artagnan? I entreat you to tell me."

"*Pardieu!* in order to arrest this haughty Titan, who, true to his motto, threatens to scale my heaven."

"Arrest M. Fouquet, do you say?"

"Ah! does that surprise you?"

"In his own house?"

"Why not? If he be guilty, he is guilty in his own house as anywhere else."

"M. Fouquet, who at this moment is ruining himself for his sovereign!"

"I believe, Mademoiselle, you are defending this traitor!"

Colbert began to chuckle silently. The king turned round at the sound of this suppressed mirth.

"Sire," said La Vallière, "it is not M. Fouquet I am defending; it is yourself."

"Me! you defend me?"

"Sire, you would be dishonoring yourself if you were to give such an order."

"Dishonor myself?" murmured the king, turning pale with anger. "In truth, Mademoiselle, you put a strange eagerness into what you say."

"I put eagerness not into what I say, but into serving your Majesty," replied the noble-hearted girl; "in that I would lay down my life, were it needed, and with the same eagerness, Sire."

Colbert seemed inclined to grumble. La Vallière, that gentle lamb, turned round upon him, and with a glance like lightning imposed silence upon him. "Monsieur," she said, "when the king acts well, if in doing so he does either myself or those who belong to me an injury, I



have nothing to say ; but were the king to confer a benefit either upon me or mine, and if he acted badly, I should tell him so."

"But it appears to me, Mademoiselle," Colbert ventured to say, "that I too love the king."

"Yes, Monsieur, we both love him, but each in a different manner," replied La Vallière, with such an accent that the heart of the young king was powerfully affected by it. "I love him so deeply that the whole world is aware of it, so purely that the king himself does not doubt my love. He is my king and my master ; I am the humblest of his servants. But he who touches his honor touches my life. Now, I repeat that they dishonor the king who advise him to arrest M. Fouquet under his own roof."

Colbert hung down his head, for he felt that the king had abandoned him. However, as he bent his head, he murmured, "Mademoiselle, I have only one word to say."

"Do not say it, then, Monsieur ; for I would not listen to it. Besides, what could you have to tell me ? That M. Fouquet has been guilty of certain crimes ? I know he has, because the king has said so ; and from the moment the king said, 'I believe,' I have no occasion for other lips to say, 'I affirm.' But were M. Fouquet the vilest of men, I should say aloud, 'M. Fouquet's person is sacred to the king because he is the king's host. Were his house a den of thieves, were Vaux a cave of coiners or robbers, his home is sacred, his palace is inviolable, since his wife is living in it ; and it is an asylum which even executioners would not dare to violate.'"

La Vallière paused, and was silent. In spite of himself, the king could not but admire her ; he was overpowered by the passionate energy of her voice, by the nobleness of the cause she advocated. Colbert yielded, overcome



by the inequality of the struggle. At last the king breathed again more freely, shook his head, and held out his hand to La Vallière. "Mademoiselle," he said gently, "why do you decide against me? Do you know what this wretched fellow will do, if I give him time to breathe again?"

"Is he not a prey which will always be within your grasp?"

"And if he escapes, and takes to flight?" exclaimed Colbert.

"Well, Monsieur, it will always remain on record, to the king's eternal honor, that he allowed M. Fouquet to flee; and the more guilty he may have been, the greater will the king's honor and glory appear, when compared with such misery and such shame."

Louis kissed La Vallière's hand, as he knelt before her.

"I am lost!" thought Colbert; then suddenly his face brightened up again. "Oh, no, no, not yet!" he said to himself.

And while the king, protected from observation by the thick covert of an enormous lime, pressed La Vallière to his breast with all the ardor of ineffable affection, Colbert tranquilly looked among the papers in his pocket-book, and drew out of it a paper folded in the form of a letter, slightly yellow, perhaps, but which must have been very precious, since the intendant smiled as he looked at it; he then bent a look full of hatred upon the charming group which the young girl and the king formed together, — a group which was revealed for a moment as the light of the approaching torches shone upon it.

Louis noticed the light reflected upon La Vallière's white dress. "Leave me, Louise," he said, "for some one is coming."

“Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle, some one is coming,” cried Colbert, to expedite the young girl’s departure.

Louise disappeared rapidly among the trees ; and then, as the king, who had been on his knees before the young girl, was rising from his humble posture, Colbert exclaimed, “Ah ! Mademoiselle de la Vallière has let something fall.”

“What is it ?” inquired the king.

“A paper, — a letter, — something white ; look there, Sire !”

The king stooped down immediately, and picked up the letter, crumpling it in his hand as he did so ; and at the same moment the torches arrived, inundating the darkness of the scene with a flood of light as bright as day.

## CHAPTER XLIII.

## JEALOUSY.

THE torches to which we have just referred, the eager attention which every one displayed, and the new ovation paid to the king by Fouquet arrived in time to suspend the effect of a resolution which La Vallière had already considerably shaken in Louis XIV.'s heart. He looked at Fouquet with a feeling almost of gratitude for having given La Vallière an opportunity of showing herself so generously disposed, so powerful in the influence she exercised over his heart. The moment of the last and greatest display had arrived. Hardly had Fouquet conducted the king towards the château, when a mass of fire burst from the dome of Vaux with a prodigious uproar, pouring a flood of dazzling light on every side, and illumining the remotest corners of the gardens. The fireworks began. Colbert, at twenty paces from the king, who was surrounded and *fêted* by the masters of Vaux, seemed, by the obstinate persistence of his gloomy thoughts, to do his utmost to recall Louis's attention, which the magnificence of the spectacle was already, in his opinion, too easily diverting.

Suddenly, just as Louis was on the point of holding his hand out to Fouquet, he perceived in it the paper which, as he believed, La Vallière had dropped at his feet as she hurried away. The still stronger magnet of love drew the young king's attention to the souvenir of his idol; and by the brilliant light, which increased mo-

mentarily in beauty, and drew forth from the neighboring villages loud exclamations of admiration, the king read the letter, which he supposed was a loving and tender epistle that La Vallière had destined for him. But as he read it, a deathlike pallor stole over his face, and an expression of deep-seated wrath, illumined by the many-colored fires, produced a terrible spectacle, which every one would have shuddered at, could they only have read his heart, which was torn by the most stormy passions. For him there was no more truce with jealousy and rage. From the moment when the dark truth was revealed to him, every gentler feeling disappeared, — piety, kindness, the religion of hospitality. In the bitter pang which wrung his heart, still too weak to hide his sufferings, he was almost on the point of uttering a cry of alarm, and calling his guards to gather round him. This letter which Colbert had thrown down at the king's feet, the reader has doubtless guessed, was the same that had disappeared with the porter Toby, at Fontainebleau, after the attempt which Fouquet had made upon La Vallière's heart. Fouquet saw the king's pallor, and was far from guessing the evil. Colbert saw the king's anger, and rejoiced inwardly at the approach of the storm.

Fouquet's voice drew the young king from his wrathful reverie. "What is the matter, Sire?" inquired the superintendent, with an expression of graceful interest.

Louis made a violent effort over himself, as he replied, "Nothing."

"I am afraid your Majesty is suffering?"

"I am suffering, and have already told you so, Monsieur; but it is nothing." The king, without waiting for the termination of the fireworks, turned towards the château. Fouquet accompanied him; and the whole court followed them, leaving the remains of the fireworks

burning for their own amusement. The superintendent endeavored again to question Louis XIV., but obtained no reply. He imagined that there had been some misunderstanding between Louis and La Vallière in the park, which had resulted in a slight quarrel; and that the king, who was not ordinarily sulky by disposition, but completely absorbed by his passion for La Vallière, had taken a dislike to every one because his mistress had shown herself offended with him. This idea was sufficient to reassure him; he had even a friendly and kindly smile for the young king, when the latter wished him good-night. This, however, was not all the king had to submit to; he was obliged to undergo the usual ceremony, which on that evening was marked by the closest adherence to the strictest etiquette. The next day was the one fixed for the departure; it was but proper that the guests should thank their host, and should show him a little attention in return for the expenditure of his twelve millions. The only remark approaching to amiability which the king could find to say to Fouquet, as he took leave of him, was in these words: "M. Fouquet, you shall hear from me. Be good enough to desire M. d'Artagnan to come here!"

The blood of Louis XIV., who had so profoundly dis-simulated his feelings, boiled in his veins; he was perfectly ready to get Fouquet's throat cut, as his predecessor had caused the assassination of the Maréchal d'Ancre. He concealed, beneath one of those royal smiles which are the lightning flashes to the thunderbolts of the State the terrible resolution he had formed. Fouquet took the king's hand, and kissed it. Louis shuddered throughout his whole frame, but allowed Fouquet to touch his hand with his lips.

Five minutes afterwards, D'Artagnan, to whom the royal

order had been communicated, entered Louis XIV.'s apartment. Aramis and Philippe were in theirs, still eagerly attentive and still listening. The king did not even give the captain of the Musketeers time to approach his arm-chair, but ran forward to meet him. "Take care," he exclaimed, "that no one enters here!"

"Very good, Sire," replied the captain, whose glance had for a long time past analyzed the ravages on the king's countenance. He gave the necessary order at the door; but returning to the king he said, "Is there some new trouble, your Majesty?"

"How many men have you here?" said the king, without making other reply to the question addressed to him.

"What for, Sire?"

"How many men have you, I say?" repeated the king, stamping upon the ground with his foot.

"I have the Musketeers."

"Well; and what others?"

"Twenty Guards and thirteen Swiss."

"How many men will be required to —"

"To do what, Sire?" replied the musketeer, opening his large, calm eyes.

"To arrest M. Fouquet."

D'Artagnan fell back a step. "To arrest M. Fouquet!" he burst forth.

"Are you going to tell me that it is impossible?" exclaimed the king, with cold and vindictive passion.

"I never said that anything is impossible," replied D'Artagnan, wounded to the quick.

"Very well; do it, then."

D'Artagnan turned on his heel, and made his way towards the door, — it was but a short distance, and he cleared it in half a dozen paces. When he reached it he suddenly paused, and said, "Your Majesty will forgive



me ; but in order to effect this arrest I should like written directions."

"For what purpose? and since when has the king's word been insufficient for you?"

"Because the word of a king when it springs from a feeling of anger may possibly change when the feeling changes."

"No more phrases, Monsieur ; you have another thought besides that?"

"Oh, I always have thoughts ; and thoughts which, unfortunately, others have not!" D'Artagnan replied impertinently.

The king, in the tempest of his wrath, hesitated, and drew back in the face of that man, just as a horse crouches on his haunches under the strong hand of a rider. "What is your thought?" he exclaimed.

"This, Sire," replied D'Artagnan : "you cause a man to be arrested when you are still under his roof ; and passion is alone the cause of that. When your anger shall have passed away you will regret what you have done ; and then I wish to be in a position to show you your signature. If that mends nothing, it will at least show us that the king is wrong to lose his temper."

"Wrong to lose his temper!" shouted the king, with frenzy. "Did not my father, my grandfather too, before me, lose their temper, body of Christ !"

"The king your father and the king your grandfather never lost their temper except in the privacy of their own palace."

"The king is master wherever he may be."

"That is a flattering phrase which cannot proceed from any one but M. Colbert ; but it happens not to be the truth. The king is at home in every man's house when he has driven its owner out of it."

The king bit his lips.

"Can it be possible?" said D'Artagnan. "Here is a man who is ruining himself in order to please you, and you wish to have him arrested! *Mordieux!* Sire, if my name were Fouquet, and any one treated me in that manner, I would swallow at a single gulp ten pieces of fireworks, and I would set fire to them and blow myself and everybody else up to the sky. But it is all the same; it is your wish, and it shall be done."

"Go!" said the king; "but have you men enough?"

"Do you suppose I am going to take a whole host to help me? To arrest M. Fouquet is so easy that a child might do it! It is like drinking a glass of bitters: one makes an ugly face, and that is all."

"If he defends himself?"

"He! not at all likely. Defend himself when such extreme harshness as you are going to practise makes him king and martyr! Nay, I am sure that if he has a million livres left, which I very much doubt, he would be willing enough to give it in order to have such a termination as this. But what does that matter? It shall be done at once."

"Stay!" said the king; "do not make his arrest a public affair."

"That will be more difficult."

"Why so?"

"Because nothing is easier than to go up to M. Fouquet in the midst of a thousand enthusiastic guests who surround him, and say 'In the king's name, I arrest you.' But to go up to him, to turn him first one way and then another, to drive him up into one of the corners of the chessboard in such a way that he cannot escape, to take him away from his guests and keep him a prisoner for you without one of them, alas! having heard anything about

it, — that, indeed, is a real difficulty, — the greatest of all, in truth ; and I hardly see how it is to be done.”

“ You had better say it is impossible, and you will have finished much sooner. *Mon Dieu !* I seem to be surrounded by people who prevent my doing what I wish.”

“ I do not prevent your doing anything. Are you decided ? ”

“ Take care of M. Fouquet until I shall have made up my mind by to-morrow morning.”

“ That shall be done, Sire.”

“ And return, when I rise in the morning, for further orders ; and now leave me to myself.”

“ You do not even want M. Colbert, then ? ” said the musketeer, firing this last shot as he was leaving the room.

The king started. With his whole mind fixed on the thought of revenge, he had forgotten the cause and substance of the offence. “ No, no one,” he said ; “ no one here. Leave me ! ”

D'Artagnan quitted the room. The king closed the door with his own hands, and began to walk up and down his apartment at a furious pace, like a wounded bull in an arena who drags after him the colored streamers and iron darts. At last he began to take comfort in the expression of his violent feelings.

“ Miserable wretch that he is ! not only does he squander my finances, but with his ill-gotten plunder he corrupts secretaries, friends, generals, artists, and all ; he even takes from me my mistress. Ah, that is the reason why that perfidious girl so boldly took his part ! Gratitude ! and who can tell whether it was not a stronger feeling, — love itself ? ” He gave himself up for a moment to his bitter reflections. “ A satyr ! ” he thought, with that abhorrent hate with which young men regard those more advanced in life, who still think of love. “ A faun who

pursues a course of gallantry and has never met resistance ; a man for silly women, who lavishes his gold and jewels in every direction, and who retains his staff of painters in order to take the portraits of his mistresses in the costume of goddesses !” The king trembled with passion as he continued : “ He pollutes and profanes everything that belongs to me ; he destroys everything that is mine ; he will be my death at last ! That man is too much for me ; he is my mortal enemy, and he shall fall ! I hate him, — I hate him, — I hate him ! ” and as he pronounced these words, he struck the arm of the chair in which he was sitting, violently over and over again, and then rose, like one in an epileptic fit. “ To-morrow ! to-morrow ! oh, happy day ! ” he murmured ; “ when the sun rises, no other rival will that bright orb have but me. That man shall fall so low that when people look at the utter ruin which my anger shall have wrought, they will be forced to confess, at least, that I am indeed greater than he.”

The king, who was incapable of mastering his emotions any longer, knocked over with a blow of his fist a small table placed close to his bedside, and in the bitterness of feeling from which he was suffering, almost weeping, and half suffocated by his passion, threw himself on his bed, dressed as he was, and bit the sheets in the extremity of his emotion, trying there to find at least repose of body. The bed creaked beneath his weight ; and with the exception of a few broken sounds which escaped from his overburdened chest, absolute silence soon reigned in the chamber of Morpheus.

## CHAPTER XLIV.

## HIGH TREASON.

THE ungovernable fury which took possession of the king at the sight and at the perusal of Fouquet's letter to La Vallière by degrees subsided into a feeling of painful weariness. Youth, full of health and life, and requiring that what it loses should be immediately restored, — youth knows not those endless, sleepless nights which realize to the unhappy the fable of the liver of Prometheus, unceasingly renewed. In instances where the man of middle life in his acquired strength of will and purpose, and the old man in his state of exhaustion find an incessant renewal of their sorrow, a young man, surprised by the sudden appearance of a misfortune, weakens himself in sighs and groans and tears, in direct struggles with it, and is thereby far sooner overthrown by the inflexible enemy with whom he is engaged. Once overthrown, his sufferings cease. Louis was conquered in a quarter of an hour. Then he ceased to clench his hands, and to burn with his looks the invisible objects of his hatred ; he ceased to attack with violent imprecations M. Fouquet and La Vallière : from fury he subsided into despair, and from despair to prostration. After he had thrown himself for a few minutes to and fro convulsively on his bed, his nerveless arms fell quietly down ; his head lay languidly on his pillow ; his limbs, exhausted by his excessive emotions, still trembled occasionally, agitated by slight muscular contractions ;

and from his breast only faint and unfrequent sighs still issued.

Morpheus, the tutelary deity of the apartment which bore his name, towards whom Louis raised his eyes, wearied by his anger and reddened by his tears, showered down upon him copiously the sleep-inducing poppies, so that the king gently closed his eyes and fell asleep. Then it seemed to him, as it often happens in that first sleep, so light and gentle, which raises the body above the couch, the soul above the earth, — it seemed to him as if the god Morpheus, painted on the ceiling, looked at him with eyes quite human ; that something shone brightly, and moved to and fro in the dome above the sleeper ; that the crowd of terrible dreams, moving off for an instant, left uncovered a human face, with a hand resting against the mouth, and in an attitude of deep and absorbed meditation. And strange enough, too, this man bore so wonderful a resemblance to the king himself, that Louis fancied he was looking at his own face reflected in a mirror ; only, that face was saddened by a feeling of the profoundest pity. Then it seemed to him as if the dome gradually retired, escaping from his gaze, and that the figures and attributes painted by Lebrun became darker and darker as the distance became more and more remote. A gentle, easy movement, as regular as that by which a vessel plunges beneath the waves, had succeeded to the immovableness of the bed. Doubtless the king was dreaming ; and in this dream the crown of gold which fastened the curtains together seemed to recede from his vision, just as the dome, to which it remained suspended, had done ; so that the winged genius which with both its hands supported the crown seemed, though vainly so, to call upon the king, who was fast disappearing from it.

The bed still sank. Louis, with his eyes open, could



not resist the deception of this cruel hallucination. At last, as the light of the royal chamber faded away into darkness and gloom, something cold, gloomy, and inexplicable seemed to infect the air. No paintings, nor gold, nor velvet hangings were visible any longer, — nothing but walls of a dull gray color, which the increasing gloom made darker every moment. And yet the bed still continued to descend; and after a minute, which seemed in its duration almost an age to the king, it reached a stratum of air black and still as death, and then it stopped. The king could no longer see the light in his room, except as from the bottom of a well we can see the light of day. “I am under the influence of a terrible dream,” he thought. “It is time to arouse myself. Come, let us wake up!”

Every one has experienced what the above remark conveys; there is no one who in the midst of a suffocating nightmare has not said to himself, by the help of that light which still burns in the brain when every human light is extinguished, “It is nothing but a dream, after all.” This was precisely what Louis XIV. said to himself. But when he said, “Let us wake up,” he perceived that not only was he already awake, but still more, that he had his eyes open also. He then looked around him. On his right hand and on his left two armed men stood silently, each wrapped in a huge cloak, and the face covered with a mask; one of them held a small lamp in his hand, whose glimmering light revealed the saddest picture a king could look upon.

Louis said to himself that his dream still lasted, and that all he had to do to cause it to disappear was to move his arms or to say something aloud. He darted from his bed, and found himself upon the damp ground. Then, addressing himself to the man who held the lamp

in his hand, he said, "What is this, Monsieur, and what is the meaning of this jest?"

"It is no jest," replied, in a deep voice, the masked figure that held the lantern.

"Do you belong to M. Fouquet?" inquired the king, greatly astonished at his situation.

"It matters very little to whom we belong," said the phantom. "We are your masters; that is sufficient."

The king, more impatient than intimidated, turned to the other masked figure. "If this is a comedy," he said, "you will tell M. Fouquet that I find it unseemly, and that I desire it should cease."

The second masked person to whom the king had addressed himself was a man of huge stature and vast circumference. He held himself erect and motionless as a block of marble.

"Well," added the king, stamping his foot, "you do not answer!"

"We do not answer you, my good monsieur," said the giant, in a stentorian voice, "because there is nothing to answer, except that you are the chief *fâcheux*, and that M. Coquelin de Volière forgot to include you in the number of his."

"At least, tell me what you want!" exclaimed Louis, folding his arms with a passionate gesture.

"You will know by and by," replied the man who held the lamp.

"In the mean time tell me where I am."

"Look!"

Louis looked all round him; but by the light of the lamp which the masked figure raised for the purpose, he could perceive nothing but the damp walls, which glistened here and there with the slimy traces of the snail.

"Oh! oh! a dungeon," said the king.

“ No, a subterranean passage.”

“ Which leads — ”

“ Will you be good enough to follow us ? ”

“ I shall not stir from hence ! ” cried the king.

“ If you are obstinate, my dear young friend,” replied the taller and stouter of the two, “ I will lift you up in my arms, will roll you up in a cloak, and if you are stifled there, why, so much the worse for you ! ” and as he said this he disengaged from beneath the cloak with which he had threatened the king a hand of which Milo of Crotona would have envied him the possession on the day when he had that unhappy idea of rending his last oak.

The king dreaded violence ; for he could well believe that the two men into whose power he had fallen had not gone so far with any idea of drawing back, and that they would consequently be ready to proceed to extremities if necessary. He shook his head, and said : “ It seems I have fallen into the hands of a couple of assassins. Move on, then ! ”

Neither of the men answered a word to this remark. The one who carried the lantern walked first, the king followed him, while the second masked figure closed the procession. In this manner they passed along a winding gallery of some length, with as many staircases leading out of it as are to be found in the mysterious and gloomy palace of Ann Radcliffe. All these windings, throughout which the king heard the sound of falling water over his head, ended at last in a long corridor closed by an iron door. The figure with the lamp opened the door with one of the keys he wore suspended at his girdle, where during the whole of the time the king had heard them rattle. As soon as the door was opened and admitted the air, Louis recognized the balmy odors which the trees exhale after a hot summer's day. He paused hesitatingly for a

moment or two ; but his huge companion who followed him thrust him out of the subterranean passage.

“ Another blow ! ” said the king, turning towards the one who had just had the audacity to touch his sovereign ; “ what do you intend to do with the King of France ? ”

“ Try to forget that word,” replied the man with the lamp, in a tone which as little admitted of reply as one of the famous decrees of Minos.

“ You deserve to be broken on the wheel for the word you have just made use of,” said the giant, as he extinguished the lamp his companion handed to him ; “ but the king is too kind-hearted.”

Louis, at that threat, made so sudden a movement that it seemed as if he meditated flight ; but the giant’s hand was placed on his shoulder, and fixed him motionless where he stood. “ But tell me, at least, where we are going,” said the king.

“ Come ! ” replied the former of the two men, with a kind of respect in his manner, and leading his prisoner towards a carriage which seemed to be in waiting.

The carriage was completely concealed amid the trees. Two horses, with their feet fettered, were fastened by a halter to the lower branches of a large oak.

“ Get in,” said the same man, opening the carriage door and letting down the step. The king obeyed, seated himself at the back of the carriage, the padded door of which was shut and locked immediately upon him and his guide. As for the giant, he cut the fastenings by which the horses were bound, harnessed them himself, and mounted on the box of the carriage, which was unoccupied. The carriage set off immediately at a quick trot, turned into the road to Paris, and in the forest of Sénart found a relay of horses fastened to the trees in the same manner in which the first horses had been, and

without a postilion. The man on the box changed the horses, and continued to follow the road towards Paris with the same rapidity, and entered the city about three o'clock in the morning. The carriage proceeded along the Faubourg St. Antoine, and after having called out to the sentinel, "By the king's order!" the driver conducted the horses into the circular enclosure of the Bastille, looking out upon the courtyard called La Cour du Gouvernement. There the horses drew up, reeking with sweat, at the flight of steps, and a sergeant of the guard ran forward.

"Go and wake the governor!" said the coachman, in a voice of thunder.

With the exception of this voice, which might have been heard at the entrance of the Faubourg St. Antoine, everything remained as calm in the carriage as in the prison. Ten minutes afterwards, M. de Baisemeaux appeared in his dressing-gown on the threshold of the door. "What is the matter now?" he asked; "and whom have you brought me there?"

The man with the lantern opened the carriage door, and said two or three words to the one who acted as driver, who immediately got down from his seat, took up a short musket which he kept under his feet, and placed its muzzle on the prisoner's chest.

"Fire at once if he speaks!" added, aloud, the man who alighted from the carriage.

"Very good!" replied his companion, without any other remark.

With this recommendation, the person who had accompanied the king in the carriage ascended the flight of steps, at the top of which the governor was awaiting him.

"M. d'Herblay!" said the latter.

"Hush!" said Aramis; "let us go into your room."

"Good heavens! what brings you here at this hour?"

"A mistake, my dear M. de Baisemeaux," Aramis replied quietly. "It appears that you were quite right the other day."

"What about?" inquired the governor.

"About the order of release, my dear friend."

"Tell me what you mean, Monsieur, — no, Monseigneur," said the governor, almost suffocated by surprise and terror.

"It is a very simple affair. You remember, dear M. de Baisemeaux, that an order of release was sent to you?"

"Yes, for Marchiali."

"Very good! we both thought that it was for Marchiali?"

"Certainly. You will recollect, however, that I did not believe it; that I was unwilling; that you compelled me."

"Oh, Baisemeaux, my good fellow, what a word to make use of! — advised, that was all."

"Advised, — yes, advised me to give him up to you; and that you carried him off with you in your carriage."

"Well, my dear M. de Baisemeaux, it was a mistake. It was discovered at the Ministry; so that I now bring you an order from the king to set at liberty Seldon, — that poor devil of a Scotchman, you know."

"Seldon! are you sure this time?"

"Well, read it yourself," added Aramis, handing him the order.

"Why," said Baisemeaux, "this order is the very same that has already passed through my hands."

"Indeed?"

"It is the very one I assured you I saw the other evening. *Parbleu!* I recognize it by the blot of ink."

"I do not know whether it is that; but, at any rate, it is the one I bring you."

"But, then, about the other?"



“What other?”

“Marchiali?”

“I have him here with me.”

“But that is not enough for me. I require a new order to take him back again.”

“Don’t talk such nonsense, my dear Baisemeaux; you talk like a child! Where is the order you received respecting Marchiali?”

Baisemeaux ran to his iron chest and took it out. Aramis seized hold of it, coolly tore it in four pieces, held them to the lamp, and burned them.

“Good heavens! what are you doing?” exclaimed Baisemeaux, in an extremity of terror.

“Look at your position a little, my dear governor,” said Aramis, with his imperturbable self-possession, “and you will see that it is very simple. You no longer possess any order justifying Marchiali’s release.”

“I am a lost man!”

“Far from it, my good fellow, since I have brought Marchiali back to you, and it is just the same as if he had never left.”

“Ah!” said the governor, completely overcome by terror.

“Plain enough, you see; and you will go and shut him up immediately.”

“I should think so, indeed.”

“And you will hand over to me this Seldon, whose liberation is authorized by this order. In this way you square your conduct; do you understand?”

“I—I—”

“You do understand, I see,” said Aramis. “Very good!”

Baisemeaux clasped his hands together.

“But why, at all events, after having taken Marchiali

away from me, do you bring him back again?" cried the unhappy governor, in a paroxysm of terror and completely dumfounded.

"For a friend such as you are," said Aramis, "for so devoted a servant, I have no secrets;" and he put his mouth close to Baisemeaux's ear, as he said in a low tone of voice, "you know the resemblance between that unfortunate fellow and —"

"And the king? — yes."

"Very good; the very first use that Marchiali made of his liberty was to pretend — Can you guess what?"

"How is it likely I should guess?"

"To pretend that he was the King of France."

"Oh, the wretch!" cried Baisemeaux.

"To dress himself up in clothes like those of the king, and attempt to play the rôle of usurper."

"Gracious heavens!"

"That is the reason why I have brought him back again, my dear friend. He is mad, and lets every one see how mad he is."

"What is to be done, then?"

"That is very simple; let no one hold any communication with him. You understand that when his peculiar style of madness came to the king's ears, the king, who had pitied his terrible affliction, and saw how his kindness of heart had been repaid by such black ingratitude, became perfectly furious; so that now, — and remember this very distinctly, dear M. de Baisemeaux, for it concerns you most closely, — so that there is now, I repeat, sentence of death pronounced against all those who may allow him to communicate with any one else save me or the king himself. You understand, Baisemeaux, — sentence of death!"

"Do I understand? *Morbleu!*"

"And now go down and conduct this poor devil back

to his dungeon again, unless you prefer he should come up here."

"What would be the good of that?"

"It would be better, perhaps, to enter his name in the prison-book at once!"

"*Pardieu!*"

"Well, then, have him up!"

Baisemeaux ordered the drums to be beaten and the bell to be rung, as a warning to every one to retire in order to avoid meeting a mysterious prisoner. Then, when the passages were free, he went to take the prisoner from the carriage, at whose breast Porthos, faithful to the directions which had been given him, still kept his musket levelled. "Ah! is that you, miserable wretch?" cried the governor, as soon as he perceived the king. "Very good, very good!" and immediately, making the king get out of the carriage, he led him, still accompanied by Porthos, who had not taken off his mask, and Aramis, who again resumed his, up the stairs, to the second Bertaudière, and opened the door of the room in which Philippe for six long years had bemoaned his existence. The king entered the cell without pronouncing a single word; he was pale and haggard. Baisemeaux shut the door upon him, turned the key twice in the lock, and then returned to Aramis. "It is quite true," he said in a low tone, "that he has a rather strong resemblance to the king, but still less so than you said."

"So that," said Aramis, "you would not have been deceived by the substitution of the one for the other."

"What a question!"

"You are a most valuable fellow, Baisemeaux," said Aramis; "and now, set Seldon free!"

"Oh, yes; I was going to forget that. I will go and give orders at once."

“Bah ! to-morrow will be time enough.”

“To-morrow ! — oh, no ! This very minute !”

“Well, go off to your affairs ! I shall go away to mine. But it is quite understood, is it not ?”

“What is ‘quite understood’ ?”

“That no one is to enter the prisoner’s cell, except with an order from the king, — an order which I will myself bring.”

“That is understood. Adieu, Monseigneur !”

Aramis returned to his companion. “Now, Porthos, my good fellow, back again to Vaux, and as fast as possible !”

“A man is light when he has faithfully served his king, and in serving him saved his country,” said Porthos. “The horses will have nothing to draw. Let us be off !” and the carriage, lightened of a prisoner who in fact seemed to Aramis very heavy, passed across the drawbridge of the Bastille, which was raised again immediately behind it.

## CHAPTER XLV.

## A NIGHT IN THE BASTILLE.

SUFFERING in human life is proportioned to human strength. We will not pretend to say that God always apportions to a man's capability of endurance the anguish he permits him to suffer; such, indeed, would not be exact, since God permits the existence of death, which is sometimes the only refuge open to those who are too closely pressed, — too bitterly afflicted, so far as the body is concerned. Suffering is proportioned to strength in this sense, — that the weak suffer more, where the trial is the same, than the strong. And what are the elementary principles which compose human strength? Are they not — more than anything else — exercise, habit, experience? We shall not even take the trouble to demonstrate that; it is an axiom in morals as in physics.

When the young king, stupefied, crushed, found himself led to a cell in the Bastille, he fancied at first that death is like sleep, and has its dreams; that the bed had broken through the flooring of his room at Vaux; that death had resulted; and that, still carrying out his dream, Louis XIV., now dead, was dreaming of those horrors, impossible to realize in life, which are termed dethronement, imprisonment, and degradation of a king all-powerful but yesterday. To be a spectator, as palpable phantom, of his own wretched suffering; to float in an incomprehensible mystery between resemblance and reality; to hear everything, to see everything, without confusing the details of that

agony, — “was it not,” said the king to himself, “a torture the more terrible since it might be eternal?”

“Is this what is termed eternity, — hell?” Louis murmured at the moment the door closed upon him, shut by Baisemeaux himself. He did not even look around him; and in that chamber, leaning with his back against the wall, he allowed himself to be carried away by the terrible supposition that he was already dead, as he closed his eyes in order to avoid looking upon something even worse. “How can I have died?” he said to himself, almost insensible. “Could that bed have been let down by some artificial means? But, no! I do not remember to have received any contusion or any shock. Would they not rather have poisoned me at one of my meals, or with the fumes of wax, as they did my ancestress Jeanne d’Albret?”

Suddenly the chill of the dungeon seemed to fall like a cloak upon Louis’s shoulders. “I have seen,” he said, “my father lying dead upon his funereal couch, in his regal robes. That pale face, so calm and worn; those hands, once so skilful, lying nerveless by his side; those limbs stiffened by the icy grasp of death, — nothing there betokened a sleep disturbed by dreams. And yet what dreams God might have sent to him, — to him whom so many others had preceded, hurried away by him into eternal death! No, that king was still the king; he was enthroned still upon that funereal couch, as upon a velvet arm-chair; he had not abdicated aught of his majesty. God, who had not punished him, cannot punish me, who have done nothing.”

A strange sound attracted the young man’s attention. He looked round him, and saw on the mantel-shelf, just below an enormous crucifix coarsely painted in fresco on the wall, a rat of enormous size engaged in nibbling a piece of dry bread, but fixing all the time an intelligent



and inquiring look upon the new occupant of the cell. The king could not resist a sudden impulse of fear and disgust. He moved back towards the door, uttering a loud cry; and as if he but needed this cry, which escaped from his breast almost unconsciously, to recognize himself, Louis knew that he was alive and in full possession of his natural senses. "A prisoner!" he cried. "I — I a prisoner!" He looked round him for a bell to summon some one to him. "There are no bells in the Bastille," he said, "and it is in the Bastille I am imprisoned. In what way can I have been made a prisoner? It is, of course, a conspiracy of M. Fouquet. I have been drawn into a snare at Vaux. M. Fouquet cannot be acting alone in this affair. His agent, — that voice I but just now heard was M. d'Herblay's; I recognized it. Colbert was right, then. But what is Fouquet's object? To reign in my place and stead? Impossible! Yet, who knows?" thought the king, relapsing into gloom. "Perhaps my brother the Duc d'Orléans is doing against me what my uncle, all through his life, wished to do against my father. But the queen? — My mother too? And La Vallière? Oh! La Vallière, — she will have been abandoned to Madame. Dear child! — yes, it is so; they have shut her up, as they have me. We are separated forever!" and at this idea of separation the lover burst into tears, with sobs and groans.

"There is a governor in this place," the king continued, in a fury of passion. "I will speak to him; I will summon him."

He called; but no voice replied to his. He seized his chair, and hurled it against the massive oaken door. The wood resounded against the door, and awakened many a mournful echo in the profound depths of the staircase; but no one responded.

This was for the king a fresh proof of the slight regard in which he was held in the Bastille. Therefore, when his first fit of anger had passed away, having noticed a barred window, through which there passed a stream of light, lozenge-shaped, which must be the luminous dawn, Louis began to call out, at first gently, then louder and louder still ; but no one replied to him. Twenty other attempts which he made, one after another, obtained no better success. His blood began to boil within him, and mount to his head. His nature was such that, accustomed to command, he trembled at the idea of disobedience. By degrees his anger increased. The prisoner broke the chair, which was too heavy for him to lift, and made use of it as a battering-ram to strike against the door. He struck with such force and rapidity that the perspiration soon began to pour down his face. The sound became tremendous and continuous ; stifled cries replied in different directions.

This sound produced a strange effect upon the king ; he paused to listen to it. It was the voices of the prisoners, — formerly his victims, now his companions. The voices ascended like vapors through the thick ceilings and the massive walls ; they complained against the author of this noise, as doubtless their sighs and tears accused, in whispered tones, the author of their captivity. After having deprived so many persons of their liberty, the king had come among them to rob them of their sleep. This idea almost drove him mad ; it redoubled his strength, or rather his will, bent upon obtaining some information or some result. With a portion of the broken chair he recommenced the noise. At the end of an hour Louis heard something in the corridor behind the door of his cell ; and a violent blow which was returned upon the door itself made him cease his own.

"Ah, there ! are you mad ?" said a rude, brutal voice. "What is the matter with you this morning ?"

"This morning !" thought the king, surprised ; but he said aloud, politely, "Monsieur, are you the governor of the Bastille ?"

"My good fellow, your head is out of sorts," replied the voice ; "but that is no reason why you should make such a terrible disturbance. Be quiet, *mordieu* !"

"Are you the governor ?" the king inquired again.

He heard a door on the corridor close ; the jailer had left without condescending to reply. When the king had assured himself of his departure, his fury knew no longer any bounds. As agile as a tiger, he leaped from the table to the window, and shook the iron bars. He broke a pane of glass, the pieces of which fell clanking into the courtyard below. He shouted with increasing hoarseness, "The governor, the governor !" This excess lasted fully an hour, during which time he was in a burning fever. With his hair in disorder and matted on his forehead, his dress torn and whitened, his linen in shreds, the king never rested until his strength was utterly exhausted ; and it was not until then that he clearly understood the pitiless thickness of the walls, the impenetrable nature of the cement, invincible to all other influence save that of time, and that he possessed no other weapon but despair. He leaned his forehead against the door, and let the feverish throbbings of his heart calm by degrees ; an additional pulsation would have made it burst.

"A moment will come when the food which is given to the prisoners will be brought to me. I shall then see some one ; I shall speak to him, and get an answer."

Then the king tried to remember at what hour the first repast of the prisoners was served in the Bastille ; he was ignorant even of this detail. The feeling of remorse at

this remembrance smote him like the keen thrust of a dagger, — that he should have lived for five-and-twenty years a king, and in the enjoyment of every happiness, without having bestowed a moment's thought on the misery of those who had been unjustly deprived of their liberty. The king blushed from shame. He felt that Heaven, in permitting this fearful humiliation, did no more than render to the man the same torture which was inflicted by that man upon so many others. Nothing could be more efficacious toward awakening religious feeling in that soul prostrated by the sense of suffering. But Louis dared not even kneel in prayer to God to entreat him to terminate his bitter trial.

"Heaven is right," he said ; "Heaven acts wisely. It would be cowardly to pray to Heaven for that which I have so often refused to my own fellow-creatures."

He had reached this stage of his reflections, — that is, of his agony of mind, — when the same noise was again heard behind his door, followed this time by the sound of the key in the lock, and of the bolts withdrawn from their staples. The king bounded forward to be nearer to the person who was about to enter ; but suddenly reflecting that it was a movement unworthy of a sovereign, he paused, assumed a noble and calm expression, which for him was easy enough, and waited with his back turned towards the window, in order to some extent to conceal his agitation from the eyes of the person who was about entering. It was only a jailer with a basket of provisions. The king looked at the man with anxiety, and waited for him to speak.

"Ah !" said the latter, "you have broken your chair, I should say ! Why, you must have become quite mad."

"Monsieur," said the king, "be careful what you say ; it will be a very serious affair for you."

The jailer placed the basket on the table, and looked at his prisoner steadily. "What do you say?" he said with surprise.

"Desire the governor to come to me," added the king, with dignity.

"Come, my boy," said the turnkey, "you have always been very quiet and reasonable; but you are getting vicious, it seems, and I wish to give you warning. You have broken your chair, and made a great disturbance; that is an offence punishable by imprisonment in one of the lower dungeons. Promise me not to begin over again, and I will not say a word about it to the governor."

"I wish to see the governor," replied the king, still controlling his passion.

"He will send you off to one of the dungeons, I tell you; so take care!"

"I insist upon it! — do you hear?"

"Ah! ah! your eyes are becoming wild again. Very good! I shall take away your knife."

The jailer did as he had said, closed the door and departed, leaving the king more astounded, more wretched, and more alone than ever. In vain he began again to pound the door; in vain he threw the plates and dishes out of the window; not a sound was heard in answer. Two hours later he could not be recognized as a king, a gentleman, a man, a human being; he might rather be called a madman, tearing the door with his nails, trying to tear up the flooring of his cell, and uttering such wild and fearful cries that the old Bastille seemed to tremble to its very foundations for having revolted against its master. As for the governor, the jailer did not even think of disturbing him; the turnkeys and the sentinels had made their report, but what was the good of it? Were not these madmen common enough

in the fortress, and were not the walls still stronger than they?

M. de Baisemeaux, thoroughly impressed with what Aramis had told him, and in perfect conformity with the king's order, hoped only that one thing might happen; namely, that the madman Marchiali might be mad enough to hang himself to the canopy of his bed or to one of the bars of the window. In fact, the prisoner was anything but a profitable investment for M. Baisemeaux, and became more annoying than agreeable to him. These complications of Seldon and Marchiali, these complications of deliverance and reincarceration, these complications of personal resemblance, would have found a very proper *dénouement*. Baisemeaux even thought he had remarked that D'Herblay himself would not be altogether dissatisfied with it.

"And then, really," said Baisemeaux to his next in command, "an ordinary prisoner is already unhappy enough in being a prisoner; he suffers quite enough indeed to induce one to hope, in charity, that his death may not be far distant. With still greater reason, then, when the prisoner has gone mad, and may bite and make a disturbance in the Bastille, — why, in that case it is not simply an act of mere charity to wish him dead; it would be almost a commendable action quietly to put him out of his misery." And the good-natured governor thereupon sat down to his late breakfast.



## CHAPTER XLVI.

## THE SHADOW OF FOUQUET.

D'ARTAGNAN, still confused and oppressed by the conversation he had just had with the king, asked himself if he were really in possession of his senses ; if the scene had occurred at Vaux ; if he, D'Artagnan, were really the captain of the Musketeers and Fouquet the owner of the château in which Louis XIV. was at that moment partaking of his hospitality. These reflections were not those of a drunken man, although everything was in prodigal profusion at Vaux, and the superintendent's wines had met with a distinguished reception at the *fête*.

The Gascon, however, was a man of calm self-possession ; and when he touched his steel blade he was able to assume, figuratively, the coolness of that steel for his great occasions. "Well," he said, as he quitted the royal apartment, "I seem now to be mixed up historically with the destinies of the king and of the minister ; it will be written that M. d'Artagnan, a younger son of a Gascon family, placed his hand on the shoulder of M. Nicholas Fouquet, the superintendent of the finances of France. My descendants, if I have any, will flatter themselves with the distinction which this arrest will confer, just as the members of the De Luynes family have done with regard to the estates of the poor Maréchal d'Ancre. But now the thing to be done is to execute the king's directions in a proper manner. Any man would know how to say to M. Fouquet, 'Your

sword, Monsieur !' But it is not every one who would be able to take care of M. Fouquet without others knowing anything about it. How am I to manage, then, so that Monsieur the Superintendent may pass from the height of favor to the direst disgrace ; so that he may exchange Vaux for a dungeon ; so that after having been steeped to his lips, as it were, in all the perfumes and incense of Ahasuerus, he may be transferred to the gallows of Haman, — in other words, of Enguerrand de Marigny ?" And at this reflection D'Artagnan's brow became clouded with perplexity. The musketeer had scruples. To deliver thus to death (for not a doubt existed that Louis hated Fouquet mortally) the man who had just shown himself so delightful and charming a host in every way, was a real case of conscience. "It seems to me," said D'Artagnan to himself, "that if I am not a wretch, I shall let M. Fouquet know the purpose of the king in regard to him. Yet if I betray my master's secret, I shall be a false-hearted knave and a traitor, — a crime provided for and punishable by military laws, as proved by the fact that twenty times in the wars I have seen miserable fellows strung up for doing in little degree what my scruples counsel me to do on a larger scale. No, I think that a man of intelligence ought to get out of this difficulty with more skill than that. And now shall we admit that I have intelligence ? It is doubtful ; having drawn on it for forty years, I shall be lucky if there be a pistole's-worth left."

D'Artagnan buried his head in his hands, tore his mustache in sheer vexation, and added : "For what reason is M. Fouquet disgraced ? For three reasons : the first, because M. Colbert does n't like him ; the second, because he wished to fall in love with Mademoiselle de la Vallière ; and, lastly, because the king likes M. Colbert and loves

Mademoiselle de la Vallière. Oh, he is a lost man ! But shall I put my foot on his neck, — I, a man, when he is falling a prey to the intrigues of a set of women and clerks ? For shame ! If he be dangerous, I will lay him low enough ; if, however, he be only persecuted, I will look on. I have come to such a decisive determination that neither king nor living man shall change my opinion. If Athos were here, he would do as I have done. Therefore, instead of going cold-bloodedly up to M. Fouquet and arresting him off-hand and shutting him up, I will try to conduct myself like a man who understands what good manners are. People will talk about it, of course ; but they shall talk well of it, I am determined." And D'Artagnan, drawing by a gesture peculiar to himself his shoulder-belt over his shoulder, went straight off to Fouquet, who having taken leave of the ladies was preparing to sleep tranquilly after the triumphs of the day.

The air was still perfumed or infected, whichever way it may be considered, with the odor of the fireworks ; the wax-lights were dying away in their sockets ; the flowers fell unfastened from the garlands ; the groups of dancers and courtiers were separating in the salons. Surrounded by his friends, who were complimenting him and receiving his flattering remarks in return, the superintendent half closed his wearied eyes. He longed for rest and quiet ; he sank upon the bed of laurels which had been heaped up for him for so many days past, — it might almost have been said that he was bowed beneath the weight of the new debts which he had incurred for the purpose of giving the greatest possible honor to this *fête*.

Fouquet had just retired to his room, still smiling, but more than half dead. He could listen to nothing more ; he could hardly keep his eyes open ; his bed seemed to

possess a fascinating and irresistible attraction for him. The god Morpheus—the presiding deity of the dome painted by Lebrun—had extended his influence over the adjoining rooms, and showered down his most sleep-inducing poppies upon the master of the house. Fouquet, almost entirely alone, was being assisted by his *valet-de-chambre* to undress, when M. d'Artagnan appeared at the entrance of the room.

D'Artagnan had never been able to succeed in making himself common at the court; and notwithstanding he was seen everywhere and on all occasions, he never failed to produce an effect wherever and whenever he made his appearance. Such is the happy privilege of certain natures, which in that respect resemble the lightning or the thunder: every one recognizes them; but their appearance never fails to arouse surprise and astonishment, and whenever it occurs the impression is always left that the last visitation was the loudest or brightest and most violent. “What! M. d'Artagnan?” said Fouquet, who had already taken his right arm out of the sleeve of his doublet.

“At your service,” replied the musketeer.

“Come in, my dear M. d'Artagnan.”

“Thank you.”

“Have you come to criticise the *fête*? You have an ingenious mind.”

“By no means.”

“Are not your men looked after properly?”

“In every way.”

“You are not comfortably lodged, perhaps?”

“Nothing could be better.”

“In that case, I have to thank you for being so amiably disposed, and I must not fail to express my obligations to you for all your flattering kindness.”

These words were as much as to say, "My dear D'Artagnan, pray go to bed, since you have a bed to lie down on, and let me do the same."

D'Artagnan did not seem to understand. "Are you going to bed already?" he said to the superintendent.

"Yes; have you anything to say to me?"

"Nothing, Monsieur; nothing at all. You sleep in this room, then?"

"Yes; as you see."

"Monsieur, you have given a most charming *fête* to the king."

"Do you think so?"

"Oh, beautiful!"

"Is the king pleased?"

"Enchanted!"

"Did he desire you to say as much to me?"

"He would not choose so unworthy a messenger, Monseigneur."

"You do not do yourself justice, M. d'Artagnan."

"Is that your bed there?"

"Yes; but why do you ask? Are you not satisfied with your own?"

"May I speak frankly to you?"

"Most assuredly."

"Well, then, I am not."

Fouquet started; and then replied, "Will you take my room, M. d'Artagnan?"

"What! deprive you of it, Monseigneur? Never!"

"What am I to do, then?"

"Allow me to share it with you."

Fouquet looked at the musketeer fixedly. "Ah! ah!" he said, "you have just left the king?"

"I have, Monseigneur."

"And the king wishes you to pass the night in my room?"

"Monseigneur —"

"Very well, M. d'Artagnan, very well. You are master here."

"I assure you, Monseigneur, that I do not wish to abuse —"

Fouquet turned to his valet, and said, "Leave us!" When the man had left, he said to D'Artagnan, "You have something to say to me?"

"I?"

"A man of your superior intelligence cannot have come to talk with a man like myself, at such an hour as the present, without grave motives."

"Do not interrogate me."

"On the contrary, what do you want with me?"

"Nothing more than the pleasure of your society."

"Come into the garden, then," said the superintendent, suddenly, "or into the park."

"No," replied the musketeer, hastily; "no."

"Why?"

"The fresh air —"

"Come, admit at once that you arrest me," said the superintendent to the captain.

"Never!" said the latter.

"You intend to look after me, then?"

"Yes, Monseigneur, I do, upon my honor."

"Upon your honor! — ah, that is quite another thing! So I am to be arrested in my own house?"

"Do not say such a thing."

"On the contrary, I will proclaim it aloud."

"If you do so, I shall be compelled to persuade you to be silent."



"Very good! Violence towards me in my own house! Ah, that is well done!"

"We do not seem to understand each other at all. Stay a moment! There is a chess-board there; we will have a game, if you have no objection."

"M. d'Artagnan, I am in disgrace, then?"

"Not at all; but —"

"I am prohibited, I suppose, from withdrawing from your sight."

"I do not understand a word you are saying, Monseigneur; and if you wish me to withdraw, tell me so."

"My dear M. d'Artagnan, your mode of action is enough to drive me mad. I was almost sinking for want of sleep, but you have completely awakened me."

"I shall never forgive myself, I am sure; and if you wish to reconcile me with myself, why, go to sleep in your bed in my presence; I shall be delighted at it."

"I am under surveillance, I see."

"I will leave the room, then."

"You are beyond my comprehension."

"Good-night, Monseigneur," said D'Artagnan, as he pretended to withdraw.

Fouquet ran after him. "I will not lie down," he said. "Seriously, and since you refuse to treat me as a man, and since you finesse with me, I will try to set you at bay, as a hunter does a wild boar."

"Bah!" cried D'Artagnan, pretending to smile.

"I shall order my horses and set off for Paris," said Fouquet, sounding the heart of the captain of the Musketeers.

"If that be the case, Monseigneur, it is very different."

"You will arrest me?"

"No; but I shall go with you."

"That is quite sufficient, M. d'Artagnan," returned

Fouquet, in a cold tone of voice. "It is not idly that you have acquired your reputation as a man of intelligence and full of resources ; but with me that is quite superfluous. Let us two come to the point. Grant me a service. Why do you arrest me ? What have I done ?"

"Oh, I know nothing about what you may have done ; but I do not arrest you — this evening."

"This evening !" said Fouquet, turning pale ; "but to-morrow ?"

"It is not to-morrow just yet, Monseigneur. Who can ever answer for the morrow ?"

"Quick, quick, Captain ! let me speak to M. d'Herblay."

"Alas ! that is quite impossible, Monseigneur. I have strict orders to see that you hold no communication with any one."

"With M. d'Herblay, Captain, — with your friend !"

"Monseigneur, is M. d'Herblay the only person with whom you ought to be prevented from holding any communication ?"

Fouquet colored, and then assuming an air of resignation, said : "You are right, Monsieur ; you have taught me a lesson that I ought not to have provoked. A fallen man cannot assert his right to anything, even to those whose fortunes he may have made ; for a still greater reason he cannot claim anything from those to whom he may never have had the happiness of doing a service."

"Monseigneur !"

"It is true, M. d'Artagnan ; you have always acted in the most admirable manner towards me, — in such a manner, indeed, as most becomes the man who is destined to arrest me. You, at least, have never asked me anything."

"Monseigneur," replied the Gascon, touched by his eloquent and noble tone of grief, "will you — I ask it as a

favor — pledge me your word as a man of honor that you will not leave this room ? ”

“ What is the use of it, dear M. d’Artagnan, since you keep watch and ward over me ? Do you suppose that I should struggle against the most valiant sword in the kingdom ? ”

“ It is not that at all, Monseigneur ; but that I am going to look for M. d’Herblay, and consequently to leave you alone.”

Fouquet uttered a cry of delight and surprise.

“ To look for M. d’Herblay, to leave me alone ! ” he exclaimed, clasping his hands together.

“ Which is M. d’Herblay’s room ? The blue room, is it not ? ”

“ Yes, my friend, yes.”

“ Your friend ! thank you for that word, Monseigneur ; you confer it upon me to-day, at least, even if you have never done so before.”

“ Ah, you have saved me ! ”

“ It will take me a good ten minutes to go from hence to the blue room, and to return ? ” said D’Artagnan.

“ Nearly so.”

“ And then to wake Aramis, who sleeps soundly when he sleeps at all, I put that down at another five minutes ; making a total of fifteen minutes’ absence. And now, Monseigneur, give me your word that you will not in any way attempt to make your escape, and that when I return I shall find you here again.”

“ I give it to you, Monsieur,” replied Fouquet, with an expression of the warmest and deepest gratitude.

D’Artagnan disappeared. Fouquet looked at him as he quitted the room, waited with feverish impatience until the door was closed behind him, and as soon as it was shut, flew to his keys, opened two or three secret doors

concealed in various articles of furniture in the room, looked vainly for certain papers, which doubtless he had left at St. Mandé, and which he seemed to regret not finding; then hurriedly seizing hold of letters, contracts, writings, he heaped them up into a pile, which he burned in the extremest haste upon the marble hearth of the fireplace, not even taking time to draw from the interior of it the vases and pots of flowers with which it was filled. As soon as he had finished, like a man who had just escaped an imminent danger, and whose strength abandons him as soon as the danger is past, he sank down, completely overcome, on a couch.

When D'Artagnan returned, he found Fouquet in the same position. The worthy musketeer had not the slightest doubt that Fouquet, having given his word, would not even think of failing to keep it; but he had thought it most likely that Fouquet would turn his (D'Artagnan's) absence to the best advantage in getting rid of all the papers, memorandums, and contracts which might possibly render his position, which was even now serious enough, still more dangerous. And so, lifting up his head like a dog who gains the scent, D'Artagnan perceived a certain odor resembling smoke, which he had fully expected to find in the atmosphere; and having found it, he made a movement of his head in token of satisfaction.

When D'Artagnan entered, Fouquet had, on his side, raised his head, and not one of D'Artagnan's movements had escaped him; and then the looks of the two men met, and they both saw that they had understood each other without exchanging a syllable. "Well!" asked Fouquet, the first to speak, "and M. d'Herblay?"

"Upon my word, Monseigneur," replied D'Artagnan, "M. d'Herblay must be desperately fond of walks by

night, and composing verses by moonlight in the park of Vaux with some of your poets in all probability ; for he is not in his room."

"What ! not in his room ?" cried Fouquet, whose last hope had thus escaped him ; for without knowing in what way the Bishop of Vannes could assist him, he well knew that he could not expect assistance from any one else.

"Or, indeed," continued D'Artagnan, "if he is in his own room, he has very good reasons for not answering."

"But surely you did not call him in such a manner that he could have heard you ?"

"You can hardly suppose, Monseigneur, that having already exceeded my orders, which forbade my leaving you a single moment, — you can hardly suppose, I say, that I should have been mad enough to rouse the whole house and allow myself to be seen in the corridor of the Bishop of Vannes, in order that M. Colbert might state with positive certainty that I gave you time to burn your papers."

"My papers ?"

"Of course ; at least, that is what I should have done in your place. When any one opens a door for me, I always avail myself of it."

"Yes, yes, and I thank you ; I have availed myself of it."

"And you have done right, *morbleu* ! Every man has his own peculiar secrets, with which others have nothing to do. But let us return to Aramis, Monseigneur."

"Well, then, I tell you, you could not have called loudly enough, or he would have heard you."

"However softly any one may call Aramis, Monseigneur, he always hears when he has an interest in hearing. I repeat what I said before, — Aramis was not in his own room, or he had certain reasons for not recognizing my voice, of which I am ignorant, and of which you even

may be ignorant yourself, notwithstanding your liegeman is his Greatness the Lord Bishop of Vannes."

Fouquet drew a deep sigh, rose from his seat, made three or four turns in his room, and finished by seating himself, with an expression of extreme dejection, upon his magnificent bed with velvet hangings and trimmed with the costliest lace. D'Artagnan looked at Fouquet with feelings of the deepest and sincerest pity.

"I have seen a good many men arrested in my life," said the musketeer, sadly, — "I have seen both M. de Cinq-Mars and M. de Chalais arrested, though I was very young then; I have seen M. de Condé arrested with the princes; I have seen M. de Retz arrested; I have seen M. Broussel arrested. Stay a moment, Monseigneur! It is disagreeable to have to say it; but the very one of all those whom you most resemble at this moment was that poor fellow Broussel. You were very near doing as he did, — putting your dinner napkin in your portfolio, and wiping your mouth with your papers. *Mordioux!* Monseigneur Fouquet, a man like you ought not to be dejected in this manner. Suppose your friends saw you."

"M. d'Artagnan," returned the superintendent, with a smile full of gentleness, "you do not understand me. It is precisely because my friends do not see me, that I am such as you see me now. I do not live isolated from others; I am nothing when left to myself. Understand that throughout my whole life I have passed every moment of my time in making friends whom I hoped to render my stay and support. In times of prosperity all these happy voices — and rendered so by me — formed in my honor a concert of praises and kindly actions. In the least disfavor, these humbler voices accompanied in harmonious accents the murmur of my own heart. Isolation I have never yet known. Poverty — a phantom I have sometimes beheld, clad in



rag, awaiting me at the end of my journey through life — poverty is the spectre with which many of my own friends have trifled for years past, which they poetize and caress, and to which they have attracted me. Poverty! — I accept it, acknowledge it, receive it as a disinherited sister; for poverty is not solitude, nor exile, nor imprisonment. Is it likely I shall ever be poor, with such friends as Pellisson, as La Fontaine, as Molière; with such a mistress as — Oh! solitude, to me, a man of society; to me, a man inclined to pleasure; to me, who exist only because others exist — Oh, if you knew how utterly lonely and desolate I feel at this moment, and how you, who separate me from all I love, seem to be the image of solitude, of annihilation, and of death!”

“But I have already told you, M. Fouquet,” replied D’Artagnan, moved to the depths of his soul, “that you exaggerate matters a great deal too much. The king likes you.”

“No, no,” said Fouquet, shaking his head.

“M. de Colbert hates you.”

“M. de Colbert! What does that matter to me?”

“He will ruin you.”

“Oh! I defy him to do that, for I am ruined already.”

At this singular confession of the superintendent, D’Artagnan cast his glance all round the room; and although he did not open his lips, Fouquet understood him so thoroughly that he added, “What can be done with these magnificent things when one is no longer magnificent? Do you know what good the greater part of the wealth and the possessions which we rich enjoy, confer upon us? — merely to disgust us, by their very splendor even, with everything which does not equal this splendor. Vaux, you will say, and the wonders of Vaux! What then? What boot these wonders? If I am ruined, how shall I fill with

water the urns which my Naiads bear in their arms, or force the air into the lungs of my Tritons? To be rich enough, M. d'Artagnan, a man must be too rich."

D'Artagnan shook his head.

"Oh, I know very well what you think," replied Fouquet, quickly. "If Vaux were yours, you would sell it, and would purchase an estate in the country, — an estate which should have woods, orchards, and fields, — an estate which should support its master. With forty millions you would do well —"

"Ten millions," interrupted D'Artagnan.

"Not a million, my dear captain! No one in France is rich enough to give two millions for Vaux, and to continue to maintain it as I have done; no one could do it, — no one would know how."

"Well," said D'Artagnan, "in any case, a million is not misery."

"It is not far from it, my dear monsieur. But you do not understand me. No; I will not sell my residence at Vaux, — I will give it to you, if you like;" and Fouquet accompanied these words with a movement of the shoulders to which it would be impossible to do justice.

"Give it to the king; you will make a better bargain."

"The king does not require me to give it to him," said Fouquet. "He will take it away from me very readily if it pleases him; and that is the reason why I should prefer to see it perish. Do you know, M. d'Artagnan, that if the king were not under my roof, I would take this candle, go straight to the dome, set fire to a couple of huge chests of fusees and fireworks which are in reserve there, and reduce my palace to ashes."

"Bah!" said the musketeer, negligently. "At all events, you would not be able to burn the gardens; and that is the best part of the establishment."

"And yet," resumed Fouquet, thoughtfully, "what was I saying? Great heavens! burn Vaux, — destroy my palace! But Vaux is not mine. This wealth, these wonderful creations, are, it is true, the property, so far as sense of enjoyment goes, of the man who has paid for them; but so far as duration is concerned, they belong to those who created them. Vaux belongs to Lebrun, to Lenôtre, to Pellisson, to Levau, to La Fontaine, to Molière; Vaux belongs to posterity, in fact. You see, M. d'Artagnan, that my very house ceases to be my own."

"That is good," said D'Artagnan; "I like that idea, and I recognize M. Fouquet himself in it. That idea, indeed, makes me forget that poor fellow Broussel altogether; and I recall no longer the whining complaints of that old Frondeur. If you are ruined, Monsieur, look at the affair manfully; for you too, *mordieux!* belong to posterity, and have no right to lessen yourself in any way. Stay a moment! Look at me, — I who seem to exercise in a degree a kind of superiority over you because I arrest you. Fate, which distributes their different parts to the comedians of this world, accorded to me a less agreeable and less advantageous part to fill than yours has been. I am one of those who think that the parts which kings and powerful nobles are called upon to act are of infinitely more worth than those of beggars or lackeys. It is better on the stage, — on the stage, I mean, of another theatre than that of this world, — it is better to wear a fine coat and to talk fine language than to walk the boards shod with a pair of old shoes, or to get one's backbone caressed by sticks well laid on. In one word, you have been a prodigal with money, have ordered and been obeyed, have been steeped to the lips in enjoyment; while I have dragged my tether after me, have been commanded and have obeyed, and have drudged my life away.

Well, although I may seem of such trifling importance beside you, Monseigneur, I do declare to you that the recollection of what I have done serves me as a spur, and prevents me from bowing my old head too soon. I shall remain until the very end a good trooper; and when my turn comes I shall fall perfectly straight, all in a heap, still alive, after having selected my place beforehand. Do as I do, M. Fouquet, — you will not find yourself the worse for it; that happens only once in a lifetime to men like yourself, and the chief thing is to do it well when the chance presents itself. There is a Latin proverb — the words have escaped me, but I remember the sense of it very well, for I have thought it over more than once — which says, ‘The end crowns the work!’”

Fouquet rose from his seat, passed his arm round D’Artagnan’s neck, and clasped him in a close embrace, while with the other hand he pressed the captain’s hand. “An excellent homily,” he said after a moment’s pause.

“A soldier’s, Monseigneur.”

“You have a regard for me in telling me all that.”

“Perhaps.”

Fouquet resumed his pensive attitude once more, and then, a moment after, said: “Where can M. d’Herblay be? I dare not ask you to send for him.”

“You would not ask me, because I would not do it, M. Fouquet. People would learn it; and Aramis, who is not mixed up with the affair, might possibly be compromised and included in your disgrace.”

“I will wait here till daylight,” said Fouquet.

“Yes; that is best.”

“What shall we do when daylight comes?”

“I know nothing at all about it, Monseigneur.”

“M. d’Artagnan, will you do me a favor?”

“Most willingly.”

"You guard me, I remain ; you are acting in the full discharge of your duty, I suppose ?"

"Certainly."

"Very good, then ; remain as close to me as my shadow, if you like. I prefer that shadow to any other." D'Artagnan bowed. "But forget that you are M. d'Artagnan, Captain of the Musketeers ; forget that I am M. Fouquet, Superintendent of the Finances, and let us talk about my affairs."

"*Peste !* a thorny subject that !"

"Truly ?"

"Yes ; but for your sake, M. Fouquet, I would do the impossible."

"Thank you. What did the king say to you ?"

"Nothing."

"Ah ! is that the way you talk ?"

"The deuce !"

"What do you think of my situation ?"

"Nothing."

"However, unless you have some ill-feeling against me—"

"Your position is a difficult one."

"In what respect ?"

"Because you are under your own roof."

"However difficult it may be, yet I understand it very well."

"Do you suppose that with any one else but yourself I should have shown so much frankness ?"

"What ! so much frankness, do you say, — you who refuse to tell me the slightest thing ?"

"At all events, then, so much ceremony and so much consideration."

"Ah ! I admit that."

"One moment, Monseigneur ! Let me tell you how I should have behaved towards any one else but yourself."

I should have arrived at your door just as your friends had left you, or if they had not yet gone I should have waited until they were leaving, and should then have caught them one after the other like rabbits ; I should have locked them up quietly ; I should have stolen softly along the carpet of your corridor, and with one hand upon you, before you suspected the slightest thing about it, I should have kept you safely until my master's breakfast in the morning. In this way I should have avoided all publicity, all disturbance, all opposition ; but there would also have been no warning for M. Fouquet, no consideration for his feelings, none of those delicate concessions which are shown by persons who are essentially courteous in their natures whenever the decisive moment may arrive. Are you satisfied with that plan ? ”

“ It makes me shudder.”

“ I thought you would not like it. It would have been very disagreeable had I chosen to appear to-morrow without notice and to ask you for your sword.”

“ Oh, Monsieur, I should have died from shame and anger.”

“ Your gratitude is too eloquently expressed. I have not done enough to deserve it, I assure you.”

“ Most certainly, Monsieur, you will never get me to believe that.”

“ Well, then, Monseigneur, if you are satisfied with what I have done, and have somewhat recovered from the shock which I prepared you for as much as I could, let us allow the few hours that remain to pass away undisturbed. You are harassed, and require to arrange your thoughts ; I beg you, therefore, to go to sleep, or pretend to go to sleep, either on your bed or in your bed. I shall sleep in this arm-chair ; and when I fall asleep my rest is so sound that a cannon could not wake me.”



Fouquet smiled. "I except, however," continued the musketeer, "the case where one opens a door, whether secret or visible, whether to go out or to come in. Oh, for that my ear is sensitive to the last degree! Any creaking noise makes me start, — it is a matter of natural antipathy. Move about as much as you like; walk up and down in any part of the room; write, efface, destroy, burn: but do not touch either the key or the handle of the door; for I should start up in a moment, and that would shake my nerves terribly."

"M. d'Artagnan," said Fouquet, "you are certainly the most witty and the most courteous man I ever met; and you will leave me only one regret, — that of having made your acquaintance so late."

D'Artagnan drew a deep sigh, which seemed to say, "Alas! you have perhaps made it too soon." He then settled himself in his arm-chair; while Fouquet, half lying on his bed and leaning on his arm, meditated upon his adventure. In this way both of them, leaving the candles burning, awaited the first dawn of day; and when Fouquet happened to sigh too loudly, D'Artagnan only snored the louder. Not a single visit, not even from Aramis, disturbed their quietude; not a sound, even, was heard throughout the vast palace. Outside, the guards of honor and the patrols of the musketeers paced up and down; and the sound of their feet could be heard on the gravel walks. It was an additional soporific for the sleepers; while the murmuring of the wind through the trees and the unceasing music of the fountains still went on uninterruptedly, without being disturbed at the slight noises and trifling affairs of which the life and death of man consist.















